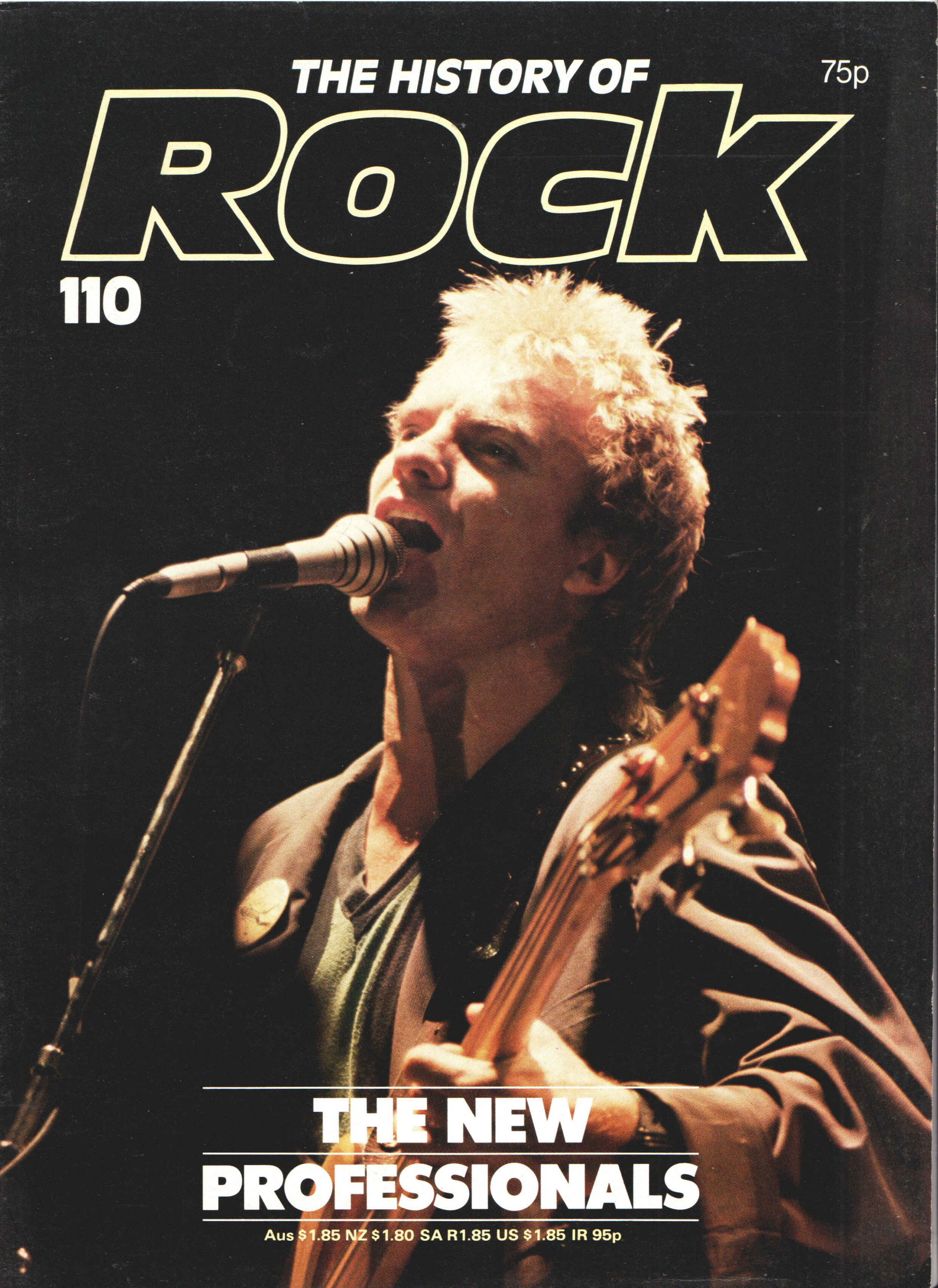
THE HISTORY OF ROCK

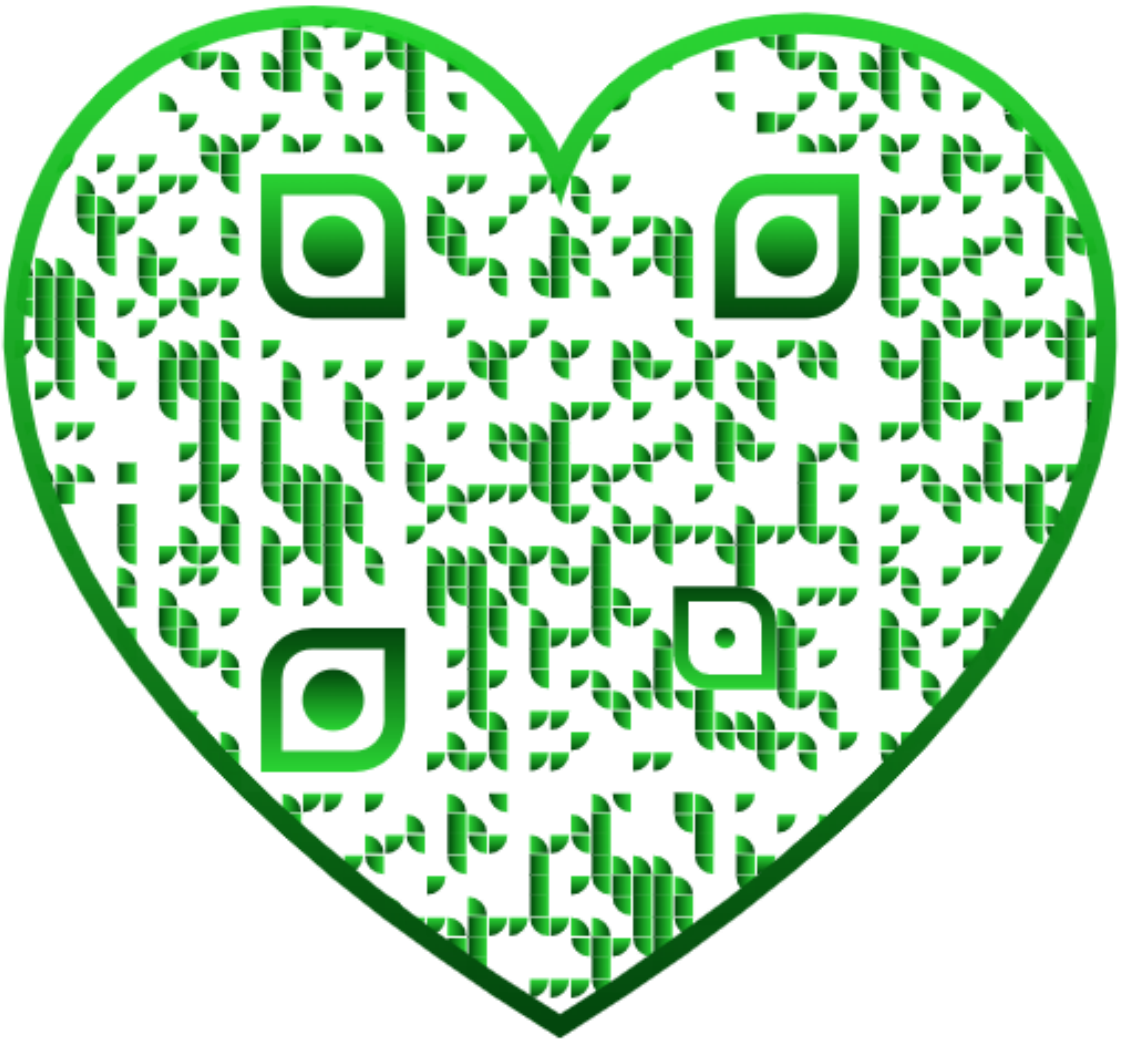
75p

110



THE NEW PROFESSIONALS

Aus $1.85 NZ $1.80 SA R1.85 US $1.85 IR 95p



THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 10 Issue 110

Editor
Michael Heatley

Production Editor
Annette Kennerley

Chief Sub-Editor
Tom Hibbert

Sub-Editors
Chris Schüler
Alastair Dougall

Picture Editors
Sarah Smith
Dave Kent

Editorial Secretary
Clare Witherden

Departmental Assistant
Darren Crook

Editorial Director
Brian Innes

Production Co-ordinator
Peter Taylor-Medhurst

Art Editor
John Heritage

Designer
Wayne Léal

Circulation Director
David Breed

Marketing Director
Michael Joyce

Consultant Editors
Ashley Brown
Charlie Gillett
Phil Hardy
Bill Millar
Peter Brookesmith

Contents

Musicians Only 2181
The post-punk era saw the return of traditional values to rock
Michael Heatley

The Police 2183
Pounding the rock and reggae beat
David Sinclair

The Stranglers 2188
The menacing music of the men in black
Graham Fuller

I'm Not Angry 2192
Did success mellow Elvis Costello?
Allan Jones

Joan Alone 2196
Joan Armatrading: rock's solitary solo star
Alastair Dougall

Sultans Of Swing 2198
The relaxed expertise of Dire Straits
Steve Clarke

CONTRIBUTORS

David Sinclair: An accomplished drummer, he has contributed in a journalistic vein to *Sound International, Musicians Only* and *Record Mirror.*
Graham Fuller: Formerly executive editor of *The Movie* and *The History Of Rock*, he has contributed articles to a number of arts magazines and recently co-edited *The Illustrated Who's Who Of The Cinema.*
Allan Jones: Currently assistant editor of *Melody Maker.*
Steve Clarke: Formerly on the staff of *New Musical Express*, he has contributed to *Rolling Stone, Time Out* and the national press.

Acknowledgements

Keith Altham 2186(T, B), 2187(T); **Andre Csillag** 2191; **Ralph Denyer** 2183; **Erica Echenberg** 2186(C); **F-Beat Records** 2192; **Jill Furmanovsky** 2182; **J. P. Leloir** 2198; **Liberty/United Artists** 2190(C); **London Features International** 2181, 2182, 2188, 2188/2189, 2193(B), 2194(Tr and l), 2196, 2197(T, B), 2199, 2200(T); **Pictorial Press** Cover, 2187(B), 2194(C); **Barry Plummer** 2200(B); **David Redfern Photography** Back cover, Inside back cover; **Rex Features** 2184/2185, 2186/2187(T, C), 2190/2191(B), 2194(B); **Star File/Bob Gruen** 2193(T, C). Photo retouching by **Roy Flooks.** Discographies compiled by **Darren Crook** and **Suresh Tolat.**

Although every effort has been made to trace present copyright holders, we apologise in advance for any unintentional omission or neglect and will be pleased to insert the appropriate acknowledgement to companies or individuals in any subsequent edition of this publication.

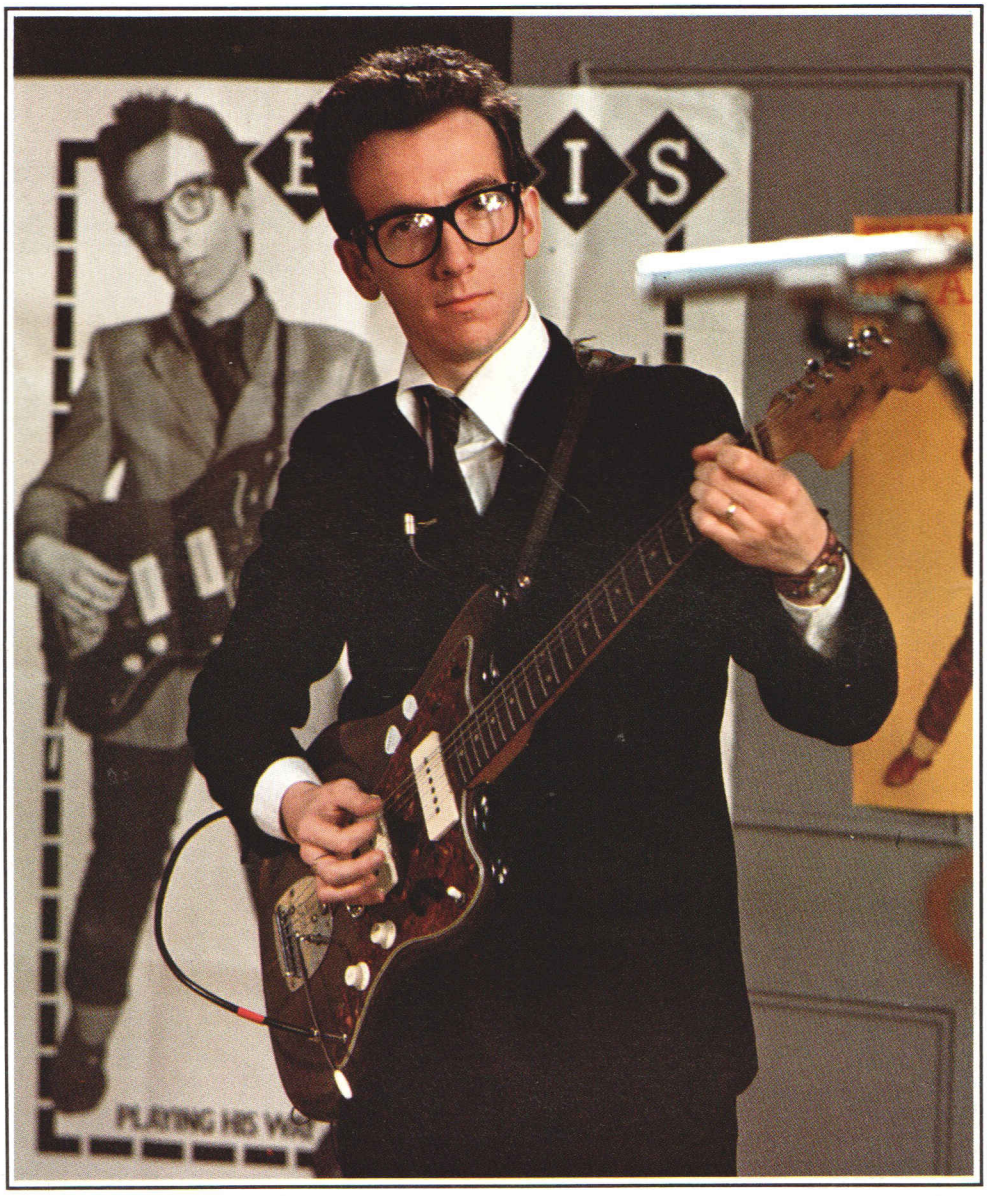
© 1984 Orbis Publishing Ltd. Printed in Great Britain by Waddington and Ledger Ltd, Dewsbury, Yorkshire. 9284

The History of Rock Price U.K. 75p I.R. 95p Aus. & N.Z. $1.85 S.A. R1.85 U.S.A. $1.85.
How to obtain copies of The History of Rock Copies are obtainable by placing a regular order at your newsagent or by taking out a subscription. **Subscription rates:** For six months (26 issues) £23.00; for one year (52 issues) £46.00. Send your order and remittance to Rock Subscriptions, Punch Subscriptions Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW., being sure to state the number of the first issue required.
Back numbers **U.K. & Eire:** Back Nos. are obtainable from your newsagent or from **History of Rock** Back Nos. Orbis Publishing Ltd., 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT at cover price. **Australia:** Back Nos. are obtainable from **The History of Rock** Back Nos., Gordon and Gotch (Aus) Ltd, 114 William Street, PO Box 767G, Melbourne, Vic 3001. **New Zealand, South Africa, Europe & Malta:** Back Nos. are available at cover price from your newsagent. In case of difficulty write to the address in your country given for binders. South African readers should add sales tax.
How to obtain binders for The History of Rock **U.K. and Eire:** Send a cheque/postal order for £3.70 per binder (incl. p. & p.), payable to Orbis Publishing Ltd, to: **The History of Rock** Binders, Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT. Please state the volume number(s) required. **Europe:** Write with remittance of £4.50 per binder (incl. p. & p.) to Orbis Publishing Ltd., England, address as above. **Australia:** For details of how to obtain your binders see inserts in early issues or write to **The History of Rock** Binders, First Post Pty Ltd, 23 Chandos Street, St Leonards, NSW 2065. The binders supplied are those illustrated in the magazine. **New Zealand:** Binders are available through your local newsagent or from **The History of Rock** Binders, Gordon and Gotch (NZ) Ltd, PO Box 1595, Wellington. **South Africa:** Binders are available through your local newsagent or through any branch of Central News Agency. In case of difficulty write to **The History of Rock** Binders, Intermag. PO Box 57394, Springfield 2137. **Malta:** Binders are obtainable by ordering from your local newsagent price £3.70. In case of difficulty write to **The History of Rock** Binders, Miller (Malta) Ltd, PO Box 272, 18a Scots Street, Valletta.

Note: Binders and Back numbers are obtainable subject to availability of stocks. Whilst every attempt is made to keep the price of issues and binders constant the publishers reserve the right to increase the stated prices at any time when circumstances dictate. Binders depicted in this publication are those produced for the **U.K. market only** and may not necessarily be identical to binders produced for sale outside the U.K. Binders and issues may be subject to import duty and/or local taxes which are not included in the above prices unless stated.

Musicians Only

The post-punk era saw the return of traditional values to rock



Elvis Costello in 1977 – that year's model. Costello's talent for writing fierce, pointed songs was unrivalled by any of his contemporaries, yet his record sales were inconsistent.

AS THE DUST SETTLED after the first earth - shaking shock wave of punk rock, the UK music business struggled to overcome a bankruptcy of ideas that had seen the balance of financial power shift dramatically from the established labels. As total record sales declined, major labels had responded by attempting to use their resources to cover all bases, often signing young bands without any knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses or with any clear idea of how to market them.

The pros step forward

Although sales of records by Pink Floyd, Yes and other leviathans of UK rock remained sizeable, the new breed of bands – who often proved to be short-lived – provided little hope for the industry. However, the middle ground was to be filled by a number of bands and singers whose traditional skills of musicianship and songwriting were championed by a new breed of rock entrepreneur. The combination of Sixties skills and Seventies marketing methods saw these artists emerge as the 'new professionals' of rock.

Musically, paying lip service to changing styles could prove potentially profitable in securing across-the-board success. Thus reggae, which had gained hip appeal during the rise of punk, provided a convenient way of by-passing the high-speed bludgeon of the new wave while identifying with the prevailing fashion. The Police's 'cut-up' technique of interspersing reggae verses with rock choruses was effective for an album's worth of songs, while Elvis Costello followed his first album – *My Aim Is True*, a singer-songwriter's debut in new-wave clothing – with his own reggae pastiche, 'Watching The Detectives'.

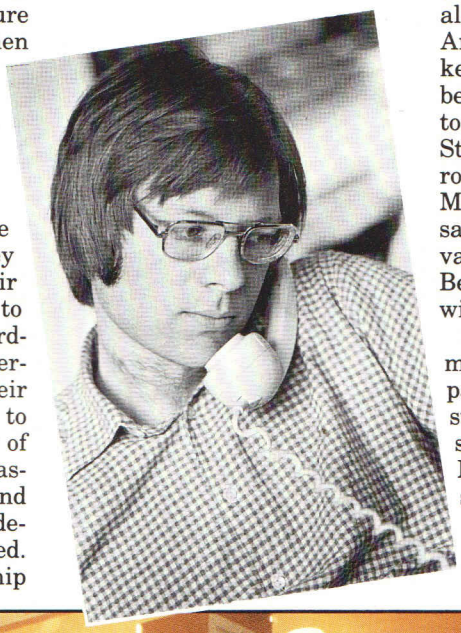
Singles were once more the currency of rock – and the budding entrepreneurs of the new wave were not slow to exploit this. Miles Copeland, a UK-based American accountant, replaced the expense accounts of his foundering British Talent Management company with a bread-line-budget operation, in which his group of labels (Faulty, Step Forward, Illegal) released

short runs of singles by unknown bands.

Although 'Fall Out', a 1977 single by his brother Stewart's band, the Police, was nothing out of the ordinary, it was successful enough for Miles to bankroll an album. While recording this, the Police 'discovered' reggae and Miles, sensing success, introduced the band to A&M Records, using the profits to set up his own International Record Syndicate label. A&M's resources helped the Police survive the failure of their first three singles, each of which finally entered the UK Top Twenty after intensive re-promotion.

A somewhat different strategy was adopted by Jake Riviera. Having started – and profited from – the new-wave record label revolution with Stiff Records, he startled the rock business by leaving partner Dave Robinson in late 1977 and starting a new label, Radar, in association with Warner Brothers. He took with him Nick Lowe and Elvis Costello and continued to handle their careers with an inspired mixture of hype and marketing – but, even when Warners withdrew their support and Radar metamorphosed into the F-Beat independent, he declined to hive off his bigger acts to provide capital to develop others.

Below: Miles Copeland, whose astute management of his brother Stewart's band the Police (bottom) helped the group to amass a fortune.



Radio stars

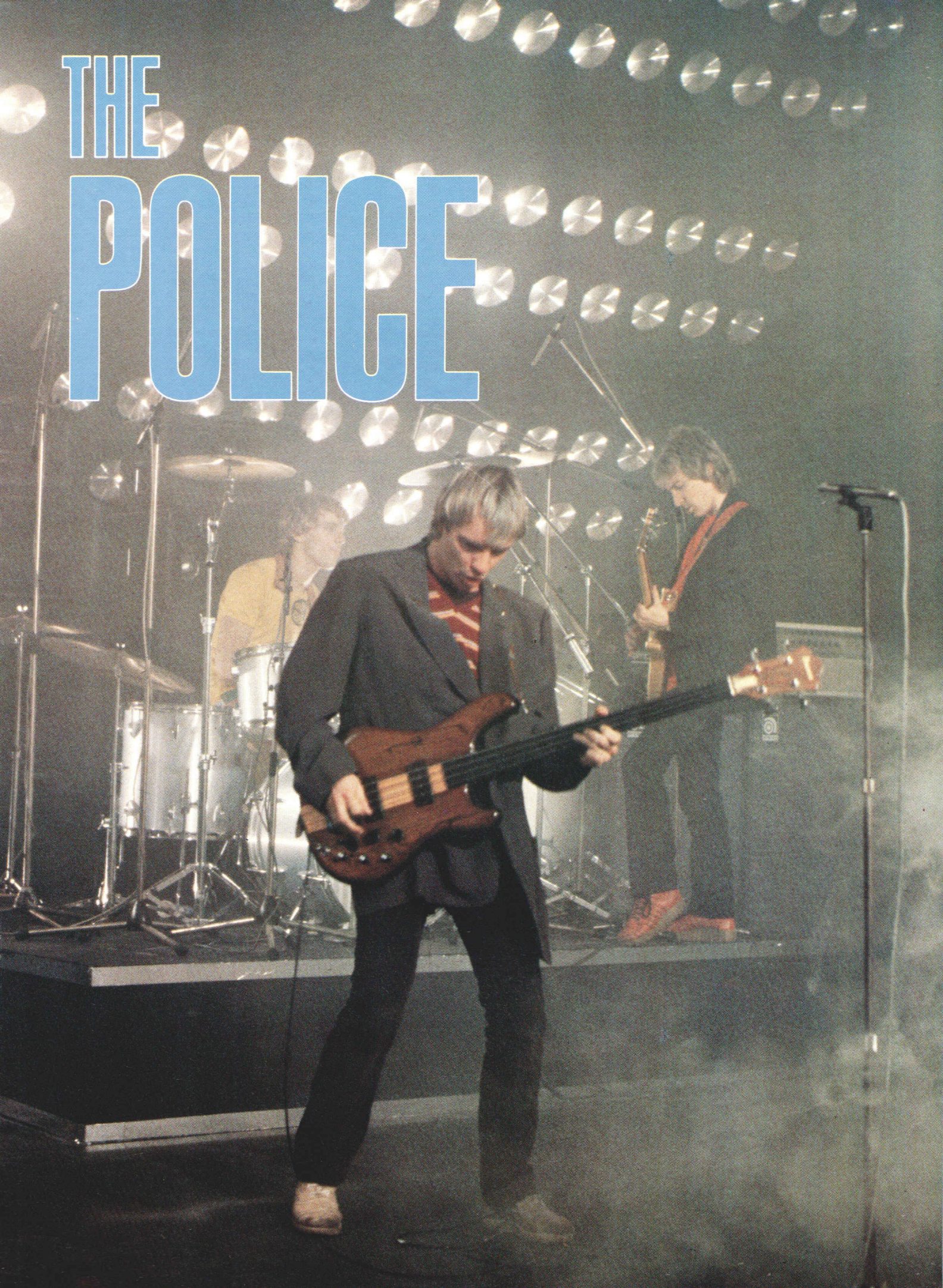
The new professionals of rock understood the need to get radio airplay, and to do so they strived to iron out the rough edges of their sound. Squeeze, for example, had attempted to bolster their new-wave credentials by recording their first album with ex-Velvet Underground man John Cale but it was not until their manager Miles Copeland re-directed them to John Wood, a respected folk-rock producer of Fairport Convention and others, that the classic pop songwriting of Glenn Tilbrook and Chris Difford was afforded the setting it deserved, and a string of classic singles followed. The Police had forged a winning partnership with engineer/producer Nigel Gray that lasted until 1980 and *Zenyatta Mondatta*, while even the Stranglers, a band that had been quick to align themselves with the raw passion of punk, allowed Martin Rushent to tidy up their sound when they first entered the recording studio.

The advent of Dire Straits symbolised the return of the musicianly attributes that had been temporarily eclipsed when punk suggested that a musical vocabulary in excess of three chords was not only unnecessary but heretical. Fronted by Mark Knopfler, a balding, uncharismatic ex-teacher in his late twenties, Dire Straits plainly intended to survive on musical merit alone.

By 1980, traditional values of musicianship had again become acceptable. However, in musical terms, the 'new professionals' of rock rarely managed to sustain the interest of their early work. The Police, like the Who before them, re-formed periodically to produce an album of down-the-line British rock for the American market, the Stranglers typically kept their fans in the dark as to the reasons behind their slide from the aggression of 1977 to the anaesthesia of later releases, while Dire Straits continued to plough their profitable furrow despite several personnel changes behind Mark Knopfler. Only Elvis Costello could be said to have recorded a body of work that, in its variety, bore comparison with that of the Beatles or Rolling Stones, and he was rewarded with inconsistent sales for his trouble.

In all cases, however, the bands made enough money to keep themselves, their record companies and management in early-Seventies style, and as such merit their 'new professionals' tag regardless of musical quality. In Miles Copeland's words: 'The myth of the short lifespan of a rock'n'roll star is over. When you're as big as the Police, you can afford to do things your own way.'

MICHAEL HEATLEY


THE
POLICE

Pounding the rock and reggae beat

TOWARDS THE END of the Seventies, as the rock audience became ever more fragmented, the chances of a group achieving the kind of universal success enjoyed by great Sixties bands like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones became increasingly remote. After the punk explosion of 1977, rock took on the appearance of a battlefield, the new-wave insurgents sweeping forward to be met by stern opposition from the old guard, while various other smaller factions – teenybop, reggae and heavy rock – jostled for attention on the fringes.

Against all the odds, however, one group emerged who, while using punk as a flag of convenience, won critical praise for their technical ability, skilfully weaving reggae and rock together to form a highly appealing and unusual music, and looked and sounded attractive enough to capture the hearts and minds of the early-teen audience.

Copeland pounds the beat

The Police were formed by drummer Stewart Armstrong Copeland, born on 16 July 1952 in Alexandria, Virginia, in the United States. His father's work as an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency took the family to Beirut, Lebanon, where Stewart spent much of his childhood. He was later moved to secondary school in England, after which he studied at the University of California in San Diego, majoring in music. Returning to the UK, he landed a job as drummer with Curved Air, a progressive British group fronted by vocalist Sonja Kristina (with whom he was to become romantically involved) and managed by Stewart's brother, Miles Copeland.

This was invaluable experience, and it taught Copeland a great deal about the music business. Curved Air were caught in what had become a familiar situation for many bands at that time. High overheads and big record-company advances due for repayment made the band's operation cumbersome and unprofitable, while their music had become increasingly staid and bland in response to business pressures which dictated safety as a preferable option to experimentation.

By late 1976, the band's lease of life was nearly up. Copeland, a restless man with boundless energy, found the group thoroughly frustrating and had not failed to notice the new mood of urgency that the fledgling punk movement was starting to bring to the music scene. The idea of forming his own group on more radical, basic lines was never far from his thoughts – he even had a name, the Police – but he lacked suitable recruits. It was after a gig at Newcastle Polytechnic in December 1976 that various members of Curved Air went to see local jazz-rockers Last Exit – a band which featured a vocalist/bass player by the name of Sting.

Gordon Matthew Sumner was born 2 October 1951 in Wallsend, Northumberland. Of above-average intelligence, athletic, and good looking, the young Sumner clawed his way up the educational ladder, shedding most of his Tyneside accent on the way. After an aborted university course, he trained successfully for a teacher's certificate in English and music. Between 1971 and 1974 he played in a variety of local Newcastle groups, picking up the nickname Sting when he turned up to a session wearing a black and yellow sweatshirt reminiscent of a wasp. The most accomplished of these various bands was Last Exit. 'Sting had then what he has now,' Copeland said. 'This fantastic presence. It was really pretty obvious that he had enormous potential.'

Copeland persuaded Sting to move down to London and form a band with him, although he had no guitarist lined up. That vacancy was filled by Corsican-born Henry Padovani, a novice musician, but as Copeland put it: 'He knew a few chords and he was really enthusiastic and when he'd had his hair cut and stuff he really looked the part.' The trio played sporadic gigs round the capital and recorded a single, 'Fall Out', that was released in May 1977 on the independent Illegal record label and sold encouragingly considering it had no national distribution.

But Sting was constantly at loggerheads with Padovani's lack of musicianship: 'Henry was deadweight in that sense. I just couldn't write guitar parts for him because he couldn't play them,' he said. At this point, Copeland was writing most of the group's material and Sting's interest in the band was hanging by a thread. The final piece of the jigsaw fell into place, however, when Sting and Copeland were invited by former Gong bass-player Mike Howlett to play a one-off gig in Paris with a group called Strontium 90; the group's guitarist was to be Andy Summers.

Completing the trio

Andrew James Summers was born on 31 December 1942 at Poulton-le-Fylde near Blackpool, Lancashire, and through the Sixties and Seventies he served one of the longest apprenticeships to rock superstardom on record. He was a founder member, with Zoot Money, of the R&B-oriented Big Roll Band, which changed into the psychedelic Dantalion's Chariot in 1967. He had spells with Soft Machine and the New Animals before studying classical guitar for three and a half years at San Fernando State College in the US. During the Seventies, he toured with Tim Rose, Neil Sedaka and David Essex before joining the Kevin Coyne Band in 1975 and, a year later, Kevin Ayers' band.

The Strontium 90 project was his first introduction to Copeland and Sting; a few weeks later he went to see them as the Police, with Padovani, playing at the Marquee. Summers joined in on the encore, and later suggested he should join the group. They played two gigs as a quartet before Padovani departed, later to turn up as guitarist with Wayne County and the Electric Chairs, and later in his own Flying Padovanis. The new Police trio made their debut at Birmingham's Rebecca's Club on 18 August 1977.

Men for all seasons

Summers, Copeland and Sting were all seasoned, highly skilled players inspired by the energy and attitude of punk. This caused much suspicion, both from punks on the one hand, who saw the group as lacking street credibility, and from the establishment on the other, who put it down as a blatant attempt at jumping the bandwagon. Neither view was correct, and what eventually turned people's heads was the group's successful merging of musical styles to produce a sound that was uniquely their own – particularly their use of reggae.

Freed from the technical limitations of Padovani's guitar-playing, Sting now felt more inclined to contribute to the songwriting; indeed, from this point he took over from Stewart Copeland as the group's principal composer. One of his earliest contributions was 'Roxanne', the number that finally persuaded Miles Copeland that his young brother's 'little punk band' might be worth investing some time and effort in after all.

Miles, against his own better judgement, had already lent the band enough money to start work recording an album, even though they did not have a recording contract. The plan was to produce the album as cheaply as possible and sell it independently. They calculated that if they sold 5000 copies they could break even. (The resulting album, *Outlandos D'Amour*, was eventually in the UK album charts for 96 weeks.)

Miles Copeland took 'Roxanne' to A&M Records, who agreed to release it. The fact that the Police were not paid an advance enabled Copeland to negotiate a highly favourable royalty deal, sowing the seeds of an enduringly profitable relationship with the record company. 'Roxanne' was released in April 1978 and, although not a hit, it created a stir of interest. This encouraged A&M to release a follow-up single, 'Can't Stand Losing You', in August, and to take up an option to release *Outlandos D'Amour* at the end of 1978. 'Can't Stand Losing You' nudged into the Top Fifty, and a groundswell of popular support was building. The Police were burning on a slow fuse when Miles Copeland announced his most audacious move. Unknown and unsigned outside the UK, the band were going to tour America.

In 1978, the idea of an unknown British group touring the US challenged conventional thinking. The three members of the band plus roadie/soundman Kim Turner flew to the States on Laker Airways' cut-price Skytrain, carrying their instruments as hand luggage. The four of them, travelling in one van with all their equipment, did a tour of East Coast clubs – 23 gigs in 27

days – raising interest in every town they visited and promoting 'Roxanne', which had been released as a one-shot single and which now began to get radio play, reaching Number 32.

The band made money out of the tour, showing that a streamlined, low-overheads approach could work just as well, if not better, than traditional methods. They returned to Britain with renewed vigour and the added kudos of success in the States. In April 1979, a re-released 'Roxanne' made the UK Top Twenty, *Outlandos D'Amour* entered the album charts, and the Police never looked back.

The appeal of the Police was wide-ranging, and many different factors accounted for their phenomenal success. Musically, what they did for reggae was the same thing that the Rolling Stones and other British bands in the Sixties had done for the blues; they took the basics of a specific ethnic music and built a hybrid pop style around it, thereby contributing to the central core of musical fusions that define what rock music actually *is*. They delivered this 'rock-reggae' with a brash energy derived from their admiration of punk, and operated with a taut vitality which Summers ascribed, in part, to the fact that they were a trio: 'Our three egos are all very strong . . . and in a three-piece the roles are more dynamic. From experience I know that in quartets you tend to pair off. There's a tensile strength in a trio.'

The three blonde heads, a look originally adopted for the band's participation in a chewing-gum commercial, provided the perfect visual tag, while the faces beneath were pretty enough – in Sting's case, classic heart-throb material. Thus, as well as the regular rock audience, they inherited a teenybopper market that had lain dormant since the days of the Bay City Rollers and David Cassidy.

It's the chemistry

Live, the Police opted for an exuberant, spontaneous excitement in their music. Sting, with his knee-bending left-to-right sway (a mannerism subsequently adopted by bass players the world over), would encourage the audience to engage in hand-clapping and much celebratory chanting and singing along. Copeland, all sticks and lanky limbs, provided a barrage of explosive percussion, while the lithe and compact Summers would occasionally forsake his normally serious pose to leap about the stage. The three possessed a certain indefinable chemistry common to all the great groups.

The final factor in their favour was having the entreprenurial skills of the Copeland empire to back up their talents, and the will to do business their own way. Their second album, *Reggatta De Blanc* (1979), was recorded in four weeks at a cost of between £6000 and £9000, a fraction of the amount lavished on, for instance, the second album by those doyens of street-credible new wave, the Clash. Produced by the Police and their engineer, Nigel Gray, *Reggatta De Blanc* went to Number 1 in the UK, as did the singles taken from it, 'Message In A Bottle' and 'Walking On The Moon'. During 1979 the Police sold five million singles and two million albums – but unlike most bands, they had never been in debt to a record company.

Policing the East

In 1980, their finances and future secure, Miles Copeland decided the time was right to extend the Police legend to all parts of the globe. He organised a world tour, but one that took in all sorts of places that had never even seen a rock band before. In January they set off on a two-and-a-half-month stint that took them to four continents, playing 37 cities in 19 countries including India, Egypt, Venezuela and Hong Kong. An accompanying BBC film crew recorded much of the trek for posterity, and the resulting television presentation, 'Police In The East' ensured that the folks back home were not unaware of the band's achievements.

A third album, *Zenyatta Mondatta* (1980), was recorded in some haste; despite receiving almost universal critical censure and even some negative comments from the band themselves, it appears, in retrospect, to be a remarkable, raw distillation of the Police's art. Perhaps because of the speed with which they were written and recorded, the songs tended to be concise, rather blunt statements. 'Shadows In The Rain' and 'Voices Inside My Head' were both neurotic, rhythmically-dominated atmosphere pieces that amply demonstrated the band's propensity for growth and their willingess to experiment and extemporise.

Besides boasting the usual beguiling melodies, 'Driven To Tears' and 'When The World Is Running Down, You Make The Best Of What's Still Around' signalled a new maturity in Sting's lyrical concerns. Perhaps the world tour had alerted him to troubles external to his own emotional traumas, which had been the predominant theme of most of his previous work. 'Driven To Tears' was a particularly poignant comment on token reactions to colour-supplement portrayals of Third World suffering, coming as it did from the pen of a young millionaire: 'Seems that when some innocents die/All we can offer them is a page in some magazine/Too many cameras and not enough food/This is what we've seen.'

The two singles taken from the album were the rather twee 'Don't Stand So Close To Me', the Police's third UK Number 1, and the curiously lambasted 'De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da', an untypically humble and precisely articulate testament to the power of words both as instruments of influence and deception. It was also the single that re-established their popularity in America, being their first US chart entry since 'Roxanne'.

For the rest of 1980 the band toured North and South America, but the sustained effort had begun to take its toll and dates in Australia and New Zealand were cancelled due to illness. For the first half of 1981 the three members went their separate ways, re-assembling in July in Montserrat to start work on their fourth album, *Ghost In The Machine*, with a new co-producer in Hugh Padgham. Despite their increasing prosperity and a more relaxed recording environment, it turned out to be a rather joyless album, although it reached Number 1 in the UK regardless. The nagging calypso of 'Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic' contrasted with an overall greyness exemplified by the dour 'Invisible Sun', a single whose accompanying video, incorporating scences from strife-torn Northern Ireland, was banned from BBC television.

In the same way that the Police had learned from and avoided the business mistakes of their predecessors, they also paid heed to the dangers of being taken over by the rock treadmill of non-stop writing, recording and touring. In 1982 they broke off and renewed themselves as individuals. Despite the intense workload of the Police, Sting had managed over the years to build up a promising film acting career. His first role was as the Ace Face in *Quadrophenia* (1979), a part he had landed before the Police made their breakthrough. He subsequently appeared in *Radio On* (1979), *Brimstone And Treacle* (1981) and a television production, 'Artemis 81' (1981).

In parallel with his Police career, Stewart Copeland made occasional mysterious appearances in the guise of Klark Kent. His first single, his own composition called 'Don't Care', on which Copeland played all the instruments and sang, reached Number 48 in the UK chart in August 1978, two months before the Police made their first ever chart entry with 'Can't Stand Losing You'.

May the force be with you

A second Kent release in 1980, a six-track 10-inch disc, was not successful and the stranger dropped from sight. Copeland subsequently pursued his various interests, which included polo and raising ponies, and ventured into filming. Andy Summers, meanwhile, developed his talent for photography; his work was exhibited in America, and his first volume of photographs, *Throb*, was published in October 1983. He also collaborated with guitarist Robert Fripp to produce an album of enigmatic instrumentals, *I Advance Masked* (1982).

In 1983, after a year's absence that gave rise to the inevitable rumours of a split, the band stormed back into the public eye with the *Synchronicity* album, which produced a Number 1 single in 'Every Breath You Take', plus two further hits, 'Wrapped Around Your Finger' and 'Synchronicity II'. Their success remained undiminished, and indeed reached new heights in the US, where both album and single lodged at Number 1. With their eye for the masterstroke, they staged a concert at New York's

Shea Stadium, once the scene of the historic Beatles appearance, further fuelling the Police legend.

At the movies

1983 finished with tours of America and Britain, and the announcement that 1984 was likely to be another 'year off'. Sting was set to appear in the BBC's *Threepenny Opera*, and in *Dune*, an epic film version of the science fiction classic. In addition to continuing his photography and undertaking further collaborations with Robert Fripp, Summers was planning an acting debut in a film called *Goosefoot*. Having written the soundtrack for Francis Ford Coppola's film *Rumblefish*, Copeland had completed filming a punk documentary featuring the Anti-Nowhere League, entitled *So What*.

The Police had been monumentally successful in a relatively short space of time, while apparently avoiding the pitfalls that their predecessors encountered. Although both Summers and Sting suffered broken marriages in the Eighties – evidence perhaps that success on this scale inevitably exacts a price from the individual – the Police as a group had achieved a virtually impregnable position, free from most of the usual rock'n'roll nightmares. By combining a flair for the unusual with meticulous attention to detail, they were the major group of the early Eighties.

DAVID SINCLAIR

Top, from left: 'Softly softly catchee monkey' seems to be the slogan of this rickshaw policeman! On stage (centre), the Police are somewhat more active, while their world travels took them as far off the rock tour circuit as Egypt (top right) and India. Right: Stewart Copeland takes a break from the drums, twanging Sting's electric double bass. Centre right: The globetrotting Flying Squad pay a visit. Below right: Robert Fripp and Andy Summers unmasked after their 1982 album collaboration. Far right: The magic that is Sting.

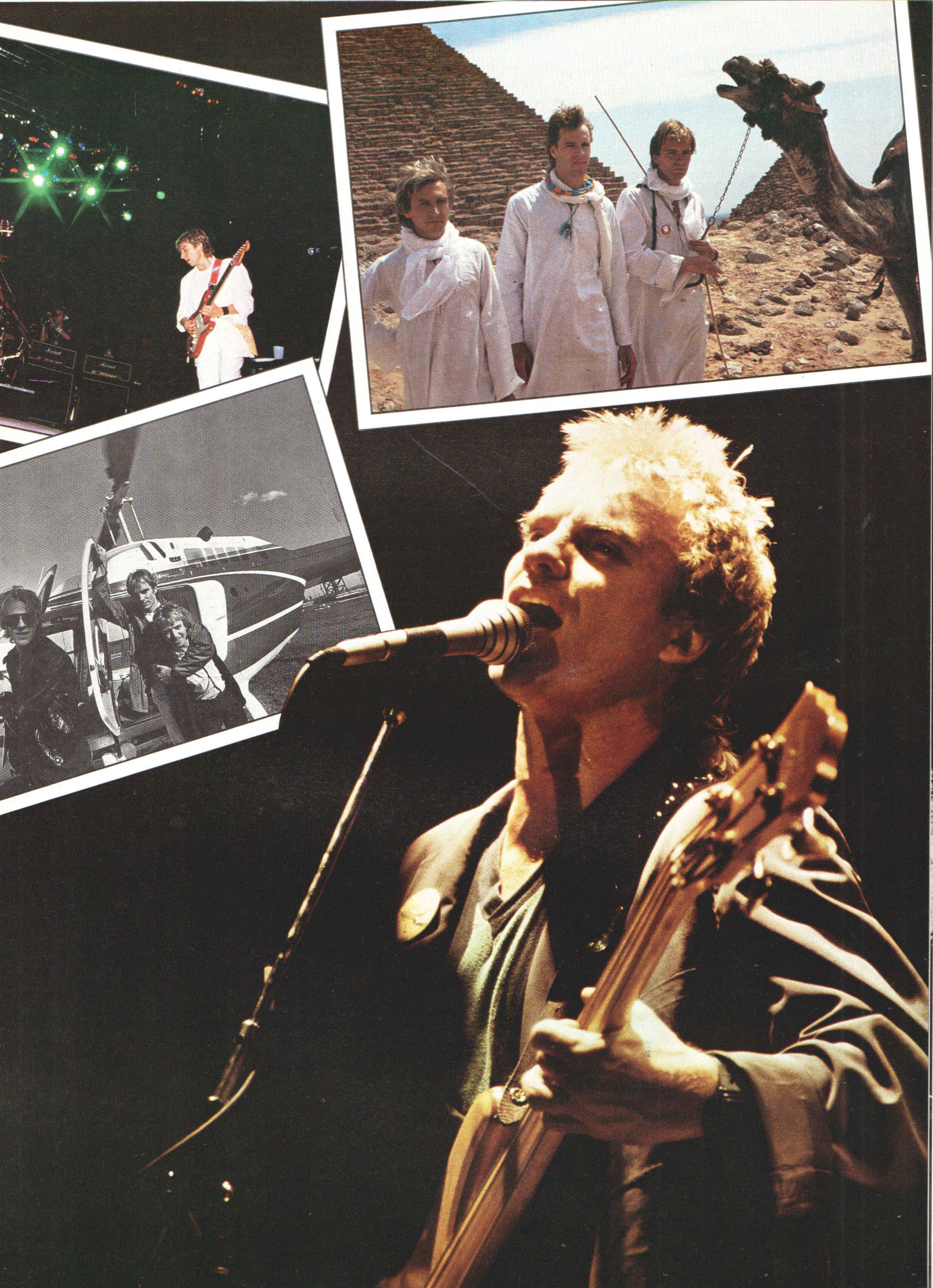
THE POLICE
Discography

Singles

Fall Out/Nothing Achieving (Illegal IL 001, 1977); Roxanne/Peanuts (A&M AMS 7348, 1978); Can't Stand Losing You/Dead End Job (A&M AMS 7381, 1978); So Lonely/No Time This Time (A&M AMS 7402, 1978); Message In A Bottle/Landlord (A&M AMS 7474, 1979); Walking On The Moon/Visions Of The Night (A&M AMS 7494, 1979); Don't Stand So Close To Me/Friends (A&M AMS 7564, 1980); De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da/A Sermon (A&M AMS 7578, 1980); Invisible Sun/Shambelle (A&M AMS 8164, 1981); Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic/Flexible Responses (A&M AMS 8174, 1981); Spirits In The Material World/Low Life (A&M AMS 8194, 1981); Every Breath You Take/Murder By Numbers (A&M AM 117, 1983); Wrapped Around Your Finger/Someone To Talk To (A&M AM 127, 1983); Synchronicity II/Once Upon A Dream (A&M AM 153, 1983).

Albums

Outlandos D'Amour (A&M AMLH 68502, 1978); *Reggatta De Blanc* (A&M AMLH 64792, 1979); *Zenyatta Mondatta* (A&M AMLH 64831, 1980); *Ghost In The Machine* (A&M AMLK 63730, 1981); *Synchronicity* (A&M AMLX 63735, 1983).

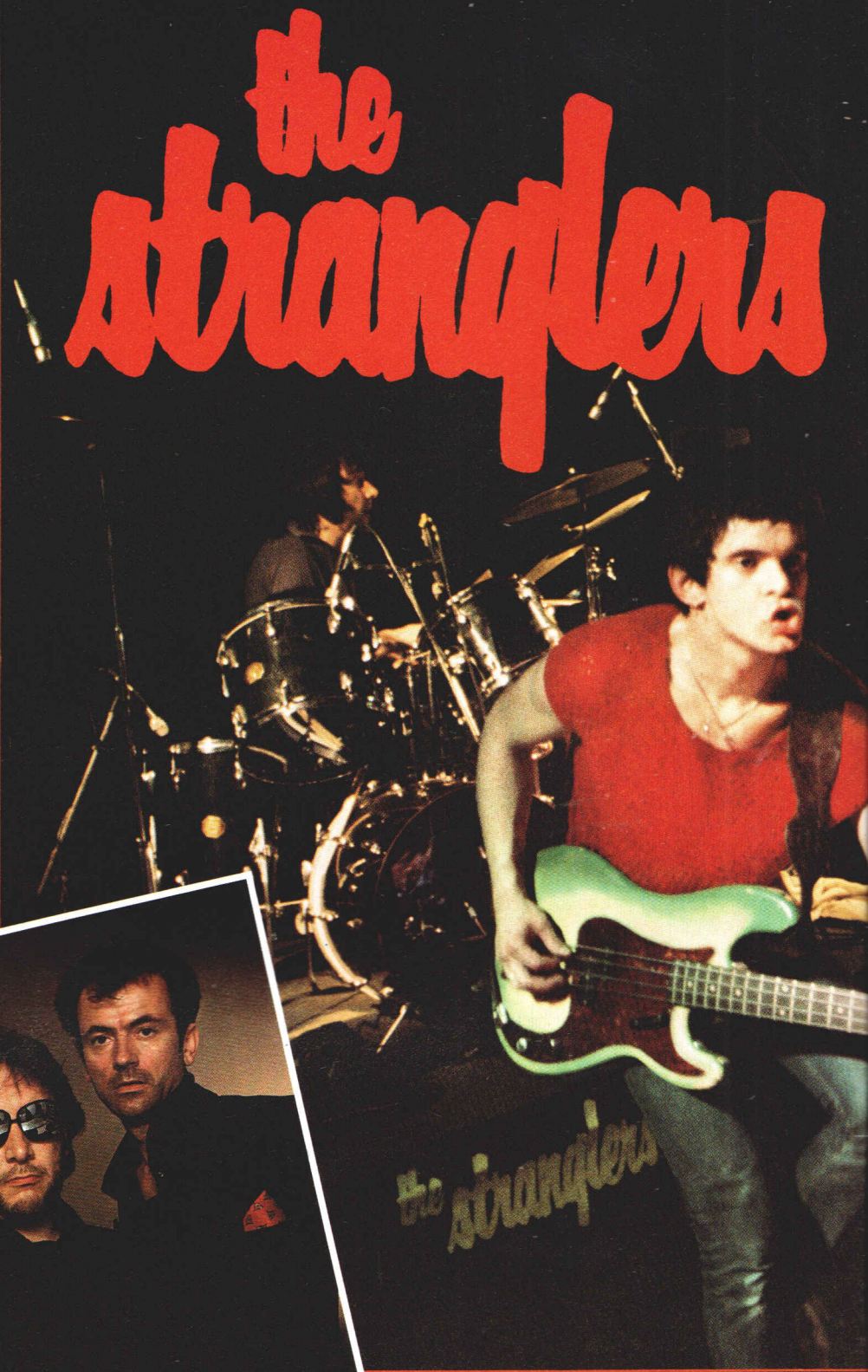


the stranglers

The menacing music of the men in black

PUNK'S ROLL CALL in early 1977 identified the Sex Pistols as depraved vandals, the Clash as a cadre of urban guerillas, the Damned as slapstick-and-horror caricatures and the Jam as angry retro-Mods. The Stranglers, clad in black, were the movement's sneering cynics, callous and pestilential. Long after the Pistols and the Jam had broken up, the Damned had become a punk music-hall joke and the Clash had turned to internecine warfare, the Stranglers continued to pump out their intoxicating rhythms, although their songs of the Eighties were fragrant and summery by comparison with their old ones. Perhaps this was a sign of changing times, or perhaps the Stranglers, despite appearances to the contrary, had always yearned to find 'true love and happiness in the present day'.

It has been argued – with some justification – that the Stranglers were never punks in the first place – drummer Jet Black was pushing 40, while most of the band had obtained degrees. Yet although the Stranglers' origins clearly predated punk, their success was definitely related to it, as was their subversive stance, their arrogance and their tendency towards violence. Their physical aggression was manifested most strongly by bass player Jean-Jacques Burnel, at times practising his black-belt karate on those fans foolish



Left: The men in black, from left Dave Greenfield, Jean-Jacques Burnel, Jet Black and Hugh Cornwell. Above: The Stranglers give a typically gripping performance.

enough to spit on him. Born in Notting Hill Gate, London, of French parents, Burnel had taken up martial arts when a much-bullied pupil at school in Guildford, Surrey. He later went to university, becoming both an accomplished classical guitarist and a would-be Hell's Angel.

Late in 1974 Burnel met singer-guitarist Hugh Cornwell and drummer Jet Black at their Guildford flat, situated

above Black's off-licence and ice-cream factory. Cornwell, from Kentish Town, North London, had read chemistry at Bristol University, taught biology and formed various bands, most notably Johnny Sox in Sweden. Once back in England, he had teamed up with Black through a music-press advertisement. With Burnel on bass, the three called themselves the Guildford Stranglers, rehearsed in a Scouts' hut and travelled to gigs in Black's ice-cream van.

In May 1975, the Stranglers recruited Brighton keyboard-player Dave Greenfield and proceeded to notch up over 200 live dates in the next 18 months. They appeared regularly at London rock venues such as the Nashville and the Hope and Anchor and then supported Patti Smith on her 1975 UK tour. The band were thus already on the verge of success when punk exploded on the music scene.

Opening doors

Unlike many of the new punk bands, the Stranglers were actually quite accomplished musicians. With Greenfield's rasping organ-work quickly earning the band a spurious (but very street-credible) comparison with the Doors, United Artists hastily signed the Stranglers for £40,000 in December 1976.

Although Burnel's abuse of journalists brought the Stranglers a lot of media attention, the band's main contribution to punk's shock tactics was Cornwell's wearing of a T-shirt bearing the word 'Fuck' at a Rainbow concert. However, Cornwell was quite clear about the importance of punk to the group's success: 'What the punk scene has made (record companies) do is turn round and see what's right under their noses. The punk onslaught on the business made our music acceptable.'

In February 1977, the Stranglers' first single '(Get A) Grip (On Yourself)' made Number 44 in the UK charts. April saw the release of *Rattus Norvegicus*, which reached Number 4 in the LP listings.

Macho men

If the twilight romanticism of 'Goodbye Toulouse' and the urban broodiness of 'Hanging Around' showed one side of the Stranglers, the album also revealed their most controversial quality. This was their deep, apparently ingrained misogyny. Four or five tracks violently abused women, with the lascivious bump and grind of 'Peaches', the leering 'Princess Of The Street' ('She's a queen of the street /What a piece of meat') and the scathing 'London Lady' being particularly offensive. The Stranglers' macho posturing, as moronic as that of the worst heavy-metal bands, lapsed so readily into bathos, however, that it seemed obviously satirical.

These deliberately crass songs, most of them boasting fine melodies and all of them beautifully played, smacked of sexual rejection by women of impotent men (hence the ferocious 'Ugly' by way of revenge). This was hardly something the oh-so-virile Stranglers would admit themselves, but it was arguable that they were striking attitudes on behalf of their predominantly male audience rather than espousing a sexist cause.

Just six months – time enough for UK Top Ten hits in 'Peaches' and 'Something Better Change' – elapsed before the Stranglers released their second album, *No More Heroes*, in September 1977. This reached Number 2 in the charts, while its fierce title track became a Number 8 hit single. *No More Heroes* was heavier and more acerbic than its predecessor. Its misogyny was nastier still in 'Bring On The Nubiles' and 'Something Better Change', while the ghoulish 'Peasant In The Big Shitty', the baleful 'English Towns' ('There is no love inside of me/I gave it to a thousand girls') and 'I Feel Like A Wog' offered dangerous visions of alienation. On a more personal level, 'Dagenham Dave' paid homage to a faithful friend and fan of the band who had died.

By 1978, the Stranglers had established themselves as one of Britain's major live bands in Britain. Their concerts were always savage affairs, with the burly Black and the sullen Greenfield behind their respective batteries of drums and keyboards and Burnel and Cornwell out front. This sinister pair – the unsmiling,

sardonic Cornwell, film-star handsome with a lick of hair dripping over his forehead, and the scowling Burnel – shared the vocals; Hugh's was the crueller voice, Jean-Jacques' the breathier one.

Despite 'Do You Wanna' and 'Nice 'n'Sleazy' (a Number 18 hit that, when played live, usually featured a stripper), the tracks on the Stranglers' third LP, *Black And White* (1978), showed them turning away from crude machismo towards more apocalyptic themes ('Curfew' and 'Enough Time') and rampant xenophobia in 'Outside Tokyo' and 'Sweden (All Quiet On The Eastern Front)'. Burnel contributed the rousing but fascistic 'Death And Night And Blood (Yukio)', inspired by the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima who had committed ritual suicide. There was also the poppy 'Hey! (Rise Of The Robots)', the anti-militaristic *blitzkrieg* of 'Tank' and an oblique love song in 'Toiler On The Sea'. Musically, the Stranglers were on especially brilliant form, and the album made Number 2 in the UK charts. The band followed this success with a sinister and highly acclaimed reworking of Dionne Warwick's hit 'Walk On By' which reached Number 21 in August 1978.

The Stranglers lost some momentum with the release, in March 1979, of the disappointing *Live (X Cert)* which failed to capture the menace of the band in performance. However, after a long break from recording, the band were back on form with their fourth studio LP, *The Raven*, which appeared in October 1979.

The tender touch

The Raven departed from both the Stranglers' characteristic Gothic organ sound – Greenfield creating some exquisite new effects with synthesisers – and their tendency towards punk power chords. Though Cornwell drily denounced California, Australia and Iran respectively in 'Dead Loss Angeles', 'Nuclear Device' and 'Shah Shah A Go Go', the songs had little of the old malevolence. Burnel gave a beautiful, insidious vocal performance on the slow-moving 'Don't Bring Harry', an anti-heroin song with weeping guitar lines, while Greenfield's voice could be heard on the chilling 'Genetix'. There were signs, moreover, that the Stranglers were matching their keener sound with a new reflective tenderness. 'The Raven' was informed with a new optimism born of past sadness: 'Fly straight with perfection/Find me a new direction/You never realised the things they said/We'll never realise until we're dead.'

'Baroque Bordello', meanwhile, was a romantic view of sex and 'Duchess' – a Number 14 hit single – was a moving pop song from Cornwell recalling an old love. This rich, experimental LP became the Stranglers' own favourite – four years later, their live sets still included up to five songs from *The Raven*.

The following year, 1980, was a bad one for the band. A concert in Nice that ended in a riot incurred the wrath of the French authorities; the Stranglers were accused of incitement and threatened with 20-year jail sentences. Although all charges were later dropped, Cornwell was then jailed in England for three weeks for possessing drugs. A third calamity then befell the band – the theft of all their gear during an American tour. Heavily in debt, the band hovered on the verge of a break-up.

A gentle disguise

They successfully overcame this crisis in their affairs, however, and in February 1981 released *TheMenInBlack*, a quasi-religious concept album about shadowy, parasitic aliens from outer space. It was their lightest effort yet and lacked conviction, apart from two strong instrumentals in 'Waltzinblack' and 'Turn The Centuries, Turn'. *La Folie*, released in November of that year, was much more consistent and could be seen as a development of styles first glimpsed on *The Raven*.

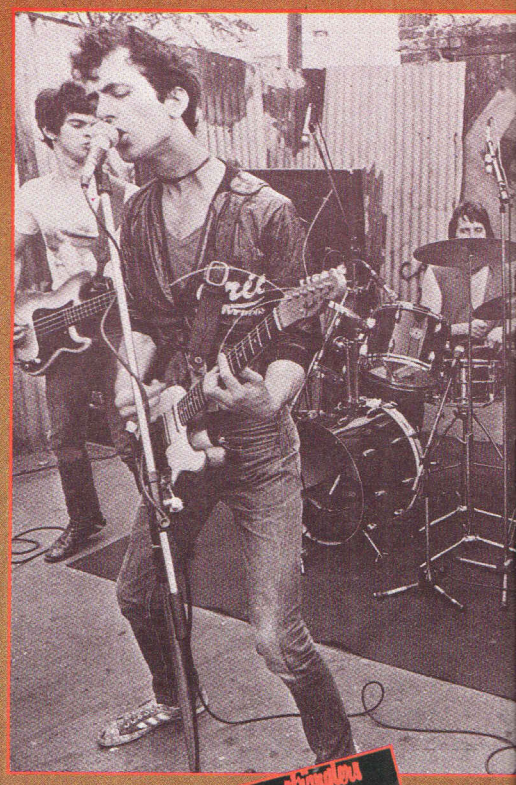
Although some of the music on *La Folie* sounded comparatively gentle, evil lurked behind its innocuous façade. Nowhere was this more true than in the mellow title track, whose lyrics, sung in French, told the true story of a Japanese student who murdered and then devoured his girlfriend. 'Tramp', 'Let Me Introduce You To The Family', 'How To Find True Love And Happiness In The Present Day' and 'The Man They Love To Hate', were among the LP's highlights, while the airy, delicate 'Golden Brown' received massive airplay on BBC Radio One and even Radio Two, and became the band's biggest hit single, reaching Number 2 in January 1982. In the same reflective vein, the single 'Strange Little Girl' made Number 7 in July of the same year.

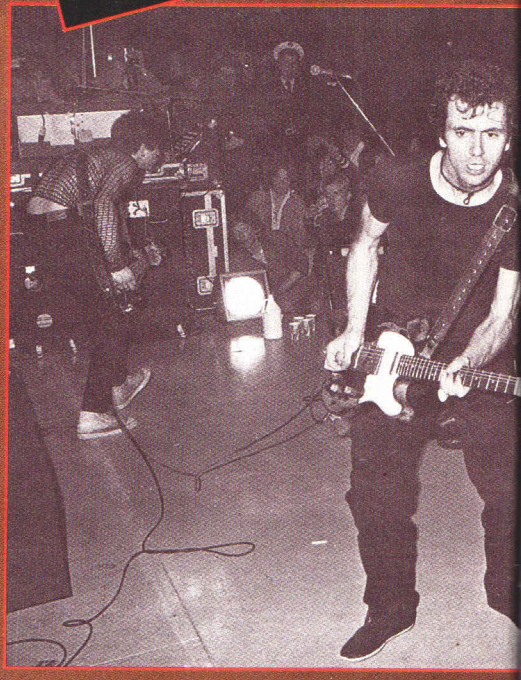
In 1983 the group released *Feline*, which provided them with a hit single in 'European Female' – yet another meditative song, it indicated that women had attained at least some degree of dignity and beauty in the eyes of the Stranglers. A slighter album than its predecessor, *Feline* was a gently played and sung set that offered a series of unassuming philosophical meditations.

Apart from various solo excursions such as Cornwell's *Nosferatu* (1979), Burnel's *Euroman Cometh* (1979) and Burnel and Greenfield's *Fire And Water* (1983), the Stranglers remained a tight, self-sufficient working unit. They progressed from punk vermin to Eighties punk philosophers, while their albums have always been fresh and provocative and their concerts exciting. The Stranglers, in rock-music terms, belie their own adage that there are 'No more heroes any more.' GRAHAM FULLER

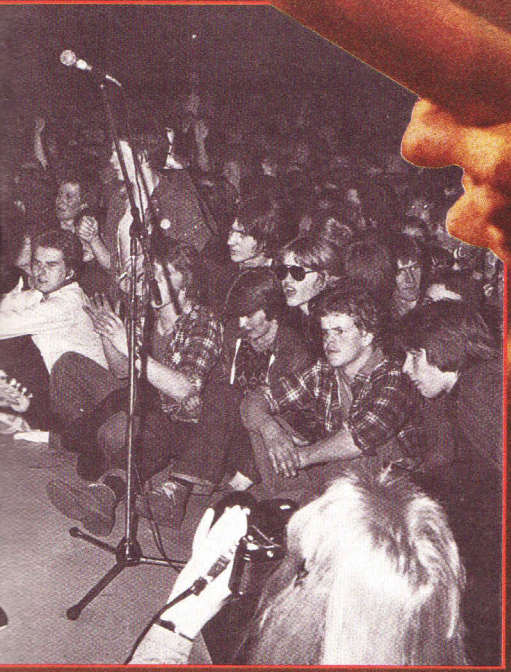
The Stranglers
Recommended Listening

Rattus Norvegicus (EMI FA 3001) (Includes: Peaches, Goodbye Toulouse, London Lady, Ugly, Down In The Sewer, Hanging Around); *The Raven* (Liberty/United Artists UAG 30262) (Includes: Longships, The Raven, Ice, Nuclear Device, Duchess, Genetix).

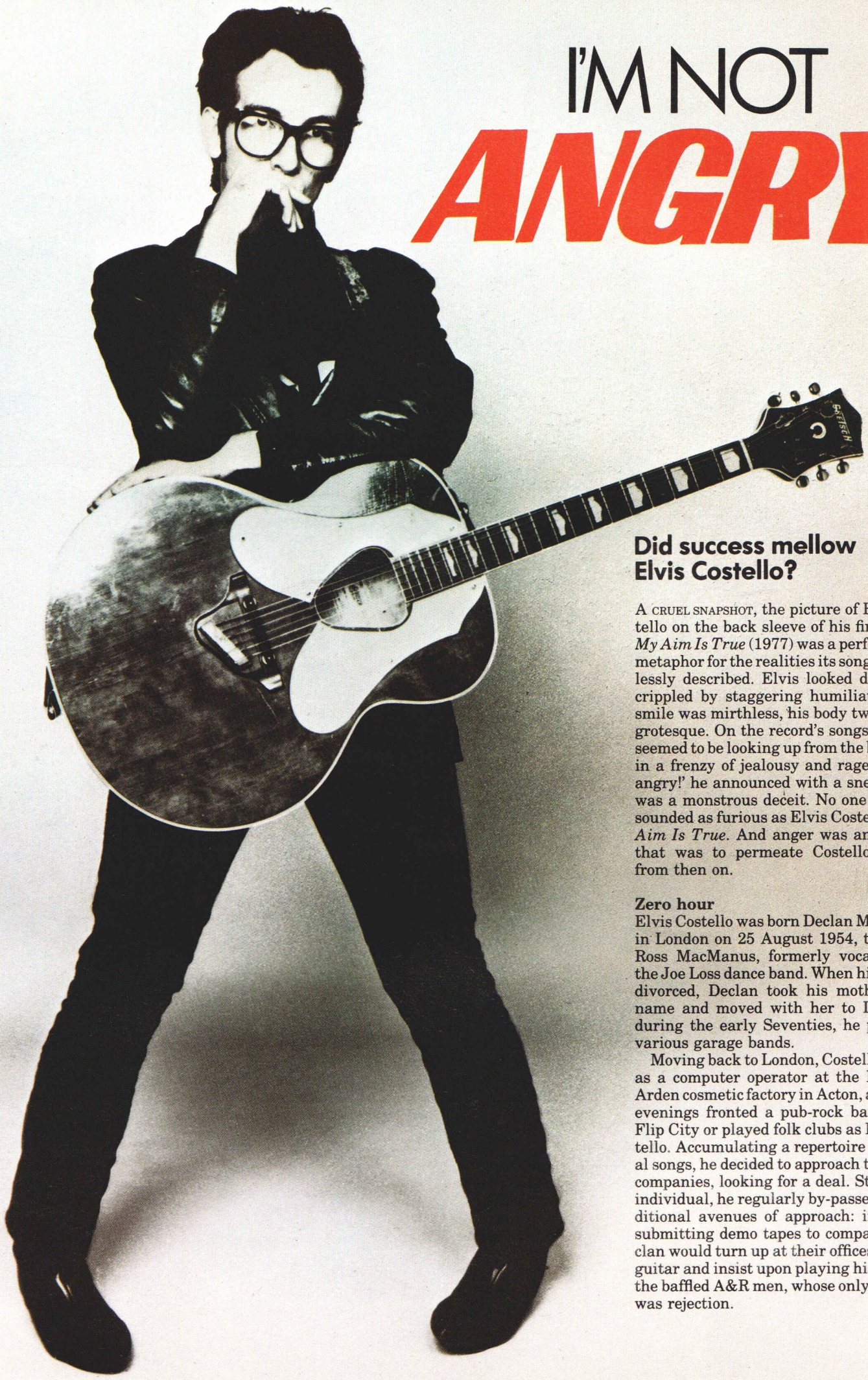




As the Stranglers grew in confidence, their image as backyard rockers (above) gave way to the sinister aura exemplified by the artwork of their 1979 LP The Raven *(left). On stage, the brooding presences of Burnel and Cornwell (below and right) remained the main focus of attention.*



I'M NOT ANGRY



Did success mellow Elvis Costello?

A CRUEL SNAPSHOT, the picture of Elvis Costello on the back sleeve of his first album *My Aim Is True* (1977) was a perfect visual metaphor for the realities its songs so ruthlessly described. Elvis looked disfigured, crippled by staggering humiliations: his smile was mirthless, his body twisted and grotesque. On the record's songs, Costello seemed to be looking up from the basement in a frenzy of jealousy and rage. 'I'm not angry!' he announced with a sneer, but it was a monstrous deceit. No one had ever sounded as furious as Elvis Costello on *My Aim Is True*. And anger was an emotion that was to permeate Costello's career from then on.

Zero hour

Elvis Costello was born Declan MacManus in London on 25 August 1954, the son of Ross MacManus, formerly vocalist with the Joe Loss dance band. When his parents divorced, Declan took his mother's surname and moved with her to Liverpool; during the early Seventies, he played in various garage bands.

Moving back to London, Costello worked as a computer operator at the Elizabeth Arden cosmetic factory in Acton, and in the evenings fronted a pub-rock band called Flip City or played folk clubs as D. P. Costello. Accumulating a repertoire of original songs, he decided to approach the record companies, looking for a deal. Stubbornly individual, he regularly by-passed the traditional avenues of approach: instead of submitting demo tapes to companies, Declan would turn up at their offices with his guitar and insist upon playing his songs to the baffled A&R men, whose only response was rejection.

Inevitably, he was drawn to Stiff Records, a label that had already become a haven for unorthodox talents. In early 1977, Jake Riviera signed Costello to Stiff, re-named him Elvis, and put him and his songs into a studio with Nick Lowe, by now established as the label's house producer. Stiff subsequently released the anti-fascist broadside 'Less Than Zero', followed by 'Alison', an intense and beautiful love ballad; the charts remained immune to the singer's charm, however.

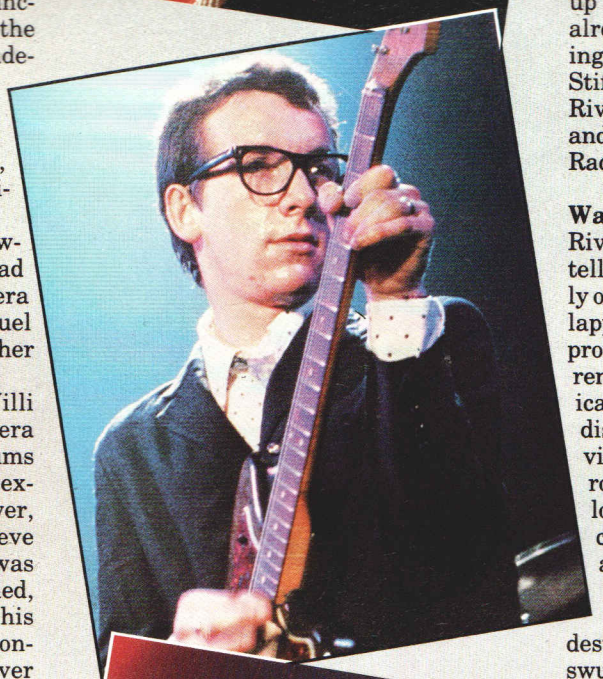
In July, Costello's debut album emerged. Produced by Nick Lowe on a budget so slim that it was almost invisible, *My Aim Is True* was a circumscribed reflection of Costello's abilities. Still something of an apprentice behind the mixing desk, Lowe could not fully accommodate the wide vocabulary of musical styles that Elvis' songwriting already embraced. More critically, the support provided by US West Coast country-rockers Clover, then resident in London, was largely functional and often a little dull. Neither the production, nor the group's playing, adequately illuminated the fierce rage and indignation of the songs – although tunes like 'Miracle Man', 'Blame It On Cain', 'I'm Not Angry', 'Mystery Dance' and 'Pay It Back' positively hummed with scathing venom.

By the time the LP was released, however, it was obvious that Costello had already outgrown its restrictions. Riviera realised that Elvis needed a band to fuel his volatile cocktails and brought together the Attractions.

Pete Thomas, formerly with Chilli Willi and the Red Hot Peppers (whom Riviera had managed) was brought in on drums and Bruce Thomas (no relation), an ex-member of British country-rockers Quiver, joined on bass. Keyboard-player Steve Mason, quickly re-christened Nieve, was the final addition. Classically trained, Nieve was untutored in rock'n'roll; at his audition, he downed a bottle of sherry, confessed that the only rock acts he had ever heard were Alice Cooper and T.Rex, and promptly passed out. But his presence in the band would be crucial: from the shrieking Farfisa organ landslides on *This Year's Model*, through the grooving Booker T.-like organ surges of *Get Happy!!*, to the florid keyboard-work of *Trust*, Nieve's intelligent versatility would be almost as important to the sound developed by Costello and the Attractions as the leader's own voice and songs.

On 26 July 1977, Elvis was arrested for busking outside the London Hilton where CBS were holding their annual conference (this was the first of many outrageous stunts devised by Riviera to promote Costello, who was later to sign to Columbia in America). That evening, having been bailed out, Elvis played his first London date with the Attractions, at Dingwalls. The next night, the Attractions played the Hope and Anchor in Islington before a packed and excited crowd. When Costello opened a residency at the Nashville later that summer, police were called in to control the rowdy fans.

Elvis was *hot*, and in November he had his first UK Top Twenty single. 'Watching The Detectives' was recorded before the formation of the Attractions with the Rumour's rhythm section, Andrew Bodnar and Steve Goulding; it seethed with paranoid sexual frustration. More complex, more startling than the explicit detonations of *My Aim Is True*, the song was released to coincide with the opening of the first Stiff Tour, a trek that combined the various talents of Costello, Nick Lowe and Dave Edmunds, Larry Wallis and Ian Dury. As the tour swung through the country, 'Watching The Detectives' clambered up the charts to Number 15. But a rift had already occurred in the Stiff camp: realising that managing both Costello and the Stiff label would be too much of a handful, Riviera had decided to split, signing Nick and Elvis to Andrew Lauder's emerging Radar label.



Opposite: 1977-vintage Elvis on the release of My Aim Is True *– 'a cruel snapshot'. Right, from top: The angry young man loosens his tie (centre) and finds a voice (bottom).*

War in peace

Riviera was clearly impatient to get Costello across to America to capitalise quickly on the success of *My Aim Is True*. The US lapped him up, but Costello was not to prove an easy catch. Bristling with belligerent energies, Costello made many American critics and much of his nascent public distinctly uneasy. Requests for interviews were sneeringly scorned; hackles rose and were quickly shaved by Costello's barbed tongue and Riviera's mischievous business tactics. Invited to appear on TV's prestigious 'Saturday Night Live', Costello had planned to play 'Less Than Zero' – but after a few desultory bars, he and the Attractions swung gleefully into the vitriolic 'Radio Radio', a song that viciously attacked the authoritarian supremacy of the radio networks.

If *My Aim Is True* described Elvis Costello to his public, the follow-up LP, *This Year's Model, defined* him for them. Released in March 1978, and prefaced by the spiteful thrust of '(I Don't Want To Go To) Chelsea' (a Number 16 hit in the UK), *This Year's Model* was played by the Attractions with a scorched-earth intensity structured around the shattering impact of Pete Thomas' sensational drum attacks.

Costello's songs, meanwhile, were a gushing tide of derision and contempt, unsparing condemnations of everything about contemporary society – and himself – that disgusted him, from the superficial fripperies of fashion, of which he was now a part, to the lurking threat of fascism. With a savage relish, Costello confronted private and general anxieties and phobias, prejudices and conceits.

Above: Elvis punches out time on stage. Above right: Costello's Attractions, from left Bruce Thomas, Pete Thomas, Elvis and Steve Nieve. Right: Horns back the band in 1983. Below: Rocking against racism, 1978.

Not since Dylan's 'Positively Fourth Street' had a performer's lyrical and musical skill so lethally matched his malicious intent as it had done on *This Year's Model*. But if it represented a peak in Costello's career, it also gave him no opportunity to climb down.

In February 1979, Elvis Costello released his third album, *Armed Forces*. This provided a UK Number 2 hit in the anti-mercenary song 'Oliver's Army', but the remainder of the LP struck many observers as somehow glib, transparently tuneful but eventually trite. Apart from the sinister elegance of 'Green Shirt', the oddly affecting opening couplets of 'Two Little Hitlers' and the supremely aching poise of the incandescent 'Accidents Will Happen', the record seemed empty.

Mr Happy

In the Spring, Costello toured America once more and, frustrated by the strict, predictable routines of another promotional campaign, he began to lose his temper with increasing regularity. Events came to a head on the night of 16 March when Elvis, the Attractions and their entourage found themselves sharing the bar at the Holiday Inn in Columbus, Ohio, with Stephen Stills, Bonnie Bramlett and their respective bands. A drunken argument ensued and a fist-fight quickly followed. Costello was alleged to have described Ray Charles as 'an ignorant blind nigger' and James Brown is said to have been dismissed by him with similar racist contempt.

Costello emerged from the fiasco as a sinister bigot. Although he claimed he had just been ferociously drunk, the damage had been done; New York gigs were picketed by anti-racism activists, most of whom had conveniently forgotten Costello's public demonstration of his sympathies for the Rock Against Racism movement at London's Brockwell Park not a year earlier. It would be 18 months before he toured the US again.

Back in England that summer, Costello produced 2-Tone ska revivalists the Specials' debut album, and in the autumn began work on a new album of his own. As the giant Warner Brothers concern had been losing money on Radar, they had decided to wind the company down; therefore, Riviera came out with his own label, F-Beat. The new project's first release was Costello's single 'I Can't Stand Up For Falling Down', a cover of an obscure B-side by Sixties soul stars Sam and Dave, which reached Number 4 in the UK charts. The second release was the album *Get Happy!!*

The irony of the title was an indication of the extent to which Costello had been affected by the traumas of the previous year. These were the songs of someone attempting to come to terms with everything that had gone wrong in both his life and his career. *Get Happy!!* was also a stylistic diversion. Elvis had obviously been listening to a lot of Sixties soul music and the album was played at the clip of a classic soul revue, 20 songs packed into 47 minutes, only one tune clocking in at more than three minutes.

Gloom still coloured Costello's general outlook, however and, after the obligatory tour to promote the album, he temporarily parted company with the Attractions. While he was deliberating upon his future, Columbia in the States released *Taking Liberties*, a 20-track collection of alternative takes, rare flipsides and previously unavailable snippets of a rare kind of genius at work: with a few minor alterations, the compilation was released in the UK as *10 Bloody Marys And 10 How's Your Fathers*.

By the end of 1980, Elvis was firing again on most of the old fronts. 'Clubland', one of his finest ever shots, was an explosive trailer for a new album. A brooding, highly charged epic that panned across a nervous social landscape with an unrelenting stare, 'Clubland' was altogether too fraught and taunting for the Christmas market and made only Number 60 in the UK singles chart. But more bewildering than the chart failure of 'Clubland' was the distinct lack of success enjoyed by *Trust*, the album that followed it in January 1981. Although the LP reached Number 9, it remained in the lists for only seven weeks.

This must have been a source of painful concern for, although Elvis was later tempted to dismiss it, *Trust* was a formidable achievement. It had its share of miscalculations, but the variety and sheer excellence of its best moments – 'Clubland', the peerless 'New Lace Sleeves', the ominous 'Big Sister's Clothes' – finally established Costello as an heir to a tradition of songwriting broader and deeper than any of his rivals could accommodate.

Soon after *Trust*, Costello went to Nashville. Elvis had always loved country music – in 1980 he had duetted with the legendary George Jones on a single, 'Stranger In The House' – and had decided to record a country-rock album of his own. Produced by C&W veteran Billy Sherrill, *Almost Blue* was full of deliciously emotional performances and his readings of 'Good Year For The Roses' (a freak UK Top Ten hit single), 'Too Far Gone' and Gram Parsons' 'Hot Burrito No 1' (here re-titled 'I'm Your Toy') were quite impeccable. Strangely, considering its somewhat parochial appeal, *Almost Blue* fared better than *Trust* in the British LP charts, reaching Number 7.

Costello ushered in 1982 with an extravagant New Year's show at London's Royal Albert Hall, at which he and the Attractions were augmented by the weight of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Meanwhile, on either side of Christmas and the New Year, Elvis had been ensconced in London's AIR Studios, recording his seventh album. Eventually released in July, *Imperial Bedroom* was obviously intended to be regarded as a 'major statement'. A suite of songs looking for a vague narrative thread, the record was overproduced and overblown. Costello's voice was everywhere, overdubbed and overbearing; Steve Nieve's keyboards were uncharacteristically prominent, while Pete Thomas' mighty drumming was reduced to a flat pat.

The record reached Number 6 in the UK album charts nonetheless, but a simultaneous succession of singles found the public stubbornly resisting every attempt Costello made to get a hit. Not that he was putting out much that anyone could honestly cheer: there was a gruff stab at Smokey Robinson's 'From Head To Toe' and there was the wretched 'Party Party', which Elvis had written as the theme for an equally wretched movie. Virtually his only good work during this period was 'Shipbuilding', a song inspired by the Falklands War, which was co-written with Clive Langer for Robert Wyatt.

By the spring of 1983, Costello's commercial standing was at a low ebb, and a new strategic assault was clearly needed to revive his career. In May, he pulled off the required coup by recording an acerbic, state-of-the-nation address called 'Pills And Soap', the lyric of which continued the theme of social concern and acid commentary that had characterised 'Shipbuilding'. In a move that would have done credit to the early Stiff marketing campaigns, Costello personally delivered copies of the record – which was credited to 'The Imposter' – to selected recipients, flattering them into a sense of conspiracy. The record reached Number 11 in the UK in July.

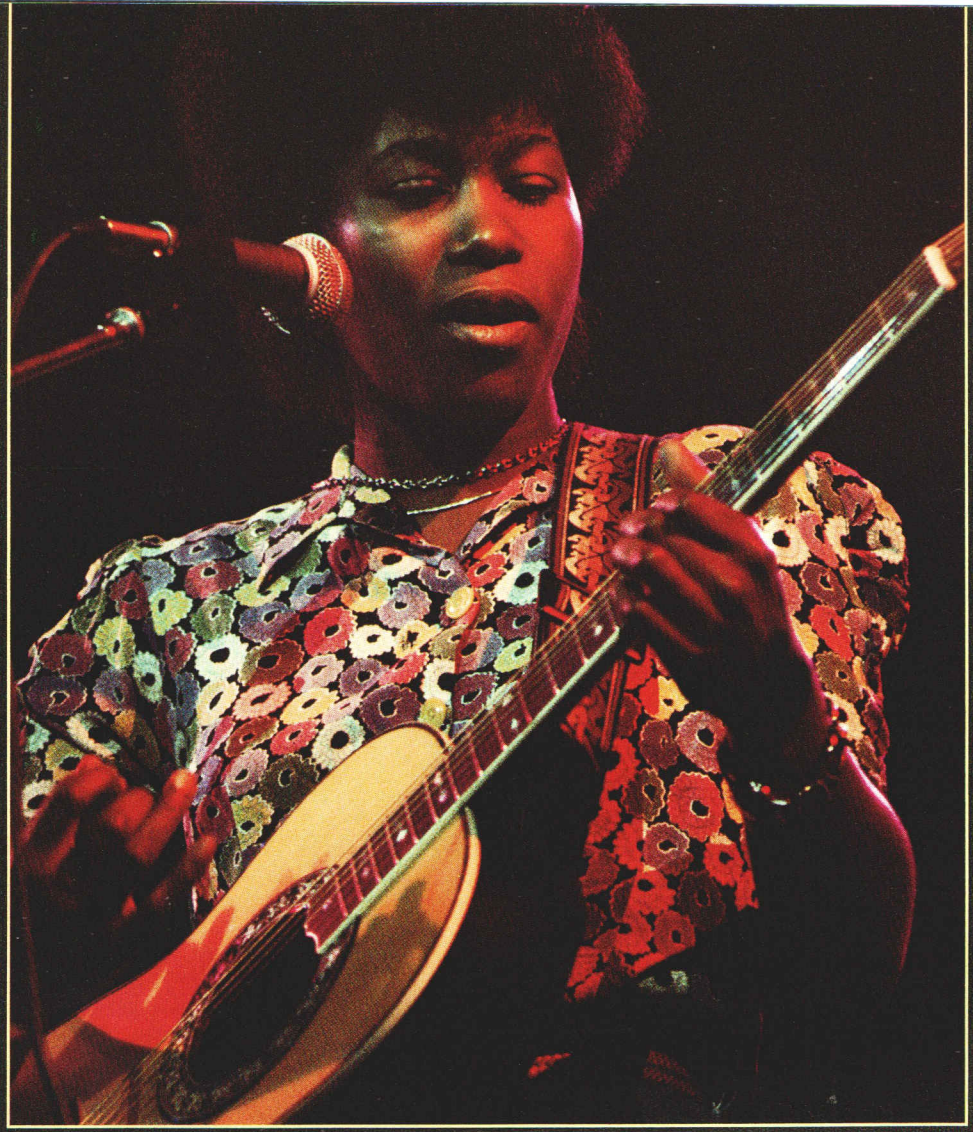
Punch The Clock, the Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley-produced album which followed at the end of the month, was another major disappointment, however. 'Every Day I Write The Book', a Top Thirty single, was one of Costello's most cultured songs but was the only genuine light on a very dim collection.

Clocking off

In the usual ironic way of things, the same public that had overlooked *Trust* flocked to the stores for *Punch The Clock* – perhaps because of the massive publicity that the new LP was afforded. Elvis appeared all over the place, beaming benevolently from the covers of a plethora of magazines, talking on the radio and disporting himself with considerable charm on television. At concerts to promote the album, he seemed to be enjoying himself hugely, but the shows were oddly deflating, lacking any sense of dramatic engagement. With *Punch The Clock*, it seemed that Costello had stopped fighting for the moment; by the end of 1983, it appeared that Elvis Costello's aim was truce. ALLAN JONES

Elvis Costello
Recommended Listening

My Aim Is True (Stiff SEEZ 3) (Includes: I'm Not Angry, (The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes, No Dancing, Miracle Man, Less Than Zero, Alison); *Trust* (WEA FB 58260) (Includes: Watch Your Step, Lover's Walk, New Lace Sleeves, Pretty Words, Clubland, White Knuckles).



JOAN ALONE

Joan Armatrading: rock's solitary solo star

'My band travel with me, but I'm not one for rushing off to parties or to clubs after my own concerts. I just go to my hotel room and shut myself in. I prefer it that way. I enjoy thinking and reading and I do a lot of reflecting. People think that I'm lonely, but I'm not. I've always been this way and I'm happier alone.'

Joan Armatrading's own summary of her touring habits has revealed her character as the antithesis of the brash personality popularly associated with the archetypal rock star. Yet beneath the unassuming exterior of this non-smoking, teetotal vegetarian slumbers an ego strong enough to have sustained her through a formidable number of solo releases – some excellent and all executed with great firmness of purpose.

While a characteristic attention to detail has been evident in her every song, this very scrupulousness has seemed to prevent her touching true depths of emotion or heights of passion, except on a handful of recordings. Although she has claimed her songs have not been especially autobiographical, they have tended to be written in the first person and dealt with affairs of the heart. Despite all this apparent soul-searching, she has remained an elusive, shadowy figure. Armatrading's stature as a major rock artist has thus resided not so much in her limited lyrical talents as in her remarkable ability to blend various musical styles – folk, gospel, jazz-funk, soul, reggae and, increasingly in the Eighties, rock – into a tasteful mélange that appealed to a mass audience.

Hair and there

Joan spent her first seven years on the island of St Kitts in the West Indies, where she was born on 9 December 1950, before moving with her family to Birmingham, England. Although her father was a part-time musician, he did not encourage her musical ambitions. She recalled: 'My father used to hide his guitar on top of the cupboard where I couldn't reach it. On reflection this might have been so that it wouldn't get damaged – but he certainly never pushed me towards music.'

While performing in a production of *Hair*, she met lyricist Pam Nestor. The two began writing together and won a recording contract with Cube Records. Yet despite the jolly 'one-big-happy-family' artwork of their subsequent LP – *Whatever's For Us* (1972), produced by Gus Dudgeon – arguments arose between Pam, Joan and Cube when Joan's name alone was featured on the sleeve. It took Joan three years to extricate herself from her contract with Cube and sign to A&M. Her first LP for that label was the Pete Gage-produced *Back To The Night* (1975), a solid rather than inspired work whose most adventurous track, the jazzy 'Cool Blue Stole My Heart', showcased her fine grasp of rhythm and dynamics.

Her combination of confident musicianship and personal diffidence quickly endeared her to the public when she began touring to promote the LP, backed by fellow A&M band the Movies. She became the special favourite of feminist audiences, the mid Seventies being a time when there were few female performers with Joan's authority operating in British rock.

To the limit

Her growing confidence was clear on the next LP, *Joan Armatrading* (1976). This was her first collaboration with noted producer Glyn Johns, whose previous credits included the Eagles and Gallagher and Lyle; the album yielded a Number 10 UK hit single in 'Love And Affection' and made Number 12 in the LP charts. Johns had assembled a superb collection of musicians, including guitarist Jerry Donahue and drummer Dave Mattacks of Fairport Convention and bassist Dave Markee. Johns later commented in John Tobler and Stuart Grundy's book *The Producers* that *Joan Armatrading* was the best album he had ever made and remembered Joan as 'the most extraordinary talent . . . she made me aware of things, of tastes I didn't even know I'd got. The most odd person to work with, who finds it totally impossible to verbalise her thoughts . . . Very difficult indeed, but wonderful.'

The chemistry that existed between Johns and the comparatively inexperienced Armatrading was just as evident on their subsequent studio recordings, *Show Some Emotion* (1977) and *To The Limit* (1978), which respectively made Number 6 and 13 in the LP charts. Despite the excellence of the backing musicians Johns employed – on *Show Some Emotion* the list included Georgie Fame (electric piano), John 'Rabbit' Bundrick (organ), Mel Collins (sax) and Henry Spinetti (drums) – the music was firmly based around the driving funk or languorous picking of Joan's acoustic guitar. Her singing on these albums was to remain her best, her voice moving effortlessly from muscular, melancholy sonorities to hit high notes of surprising delicacy and purity.

Show Some Emotion contained numerous fine tracks, in particular the ballad 'Willow' and the jazzy 'Get In The Sun' and

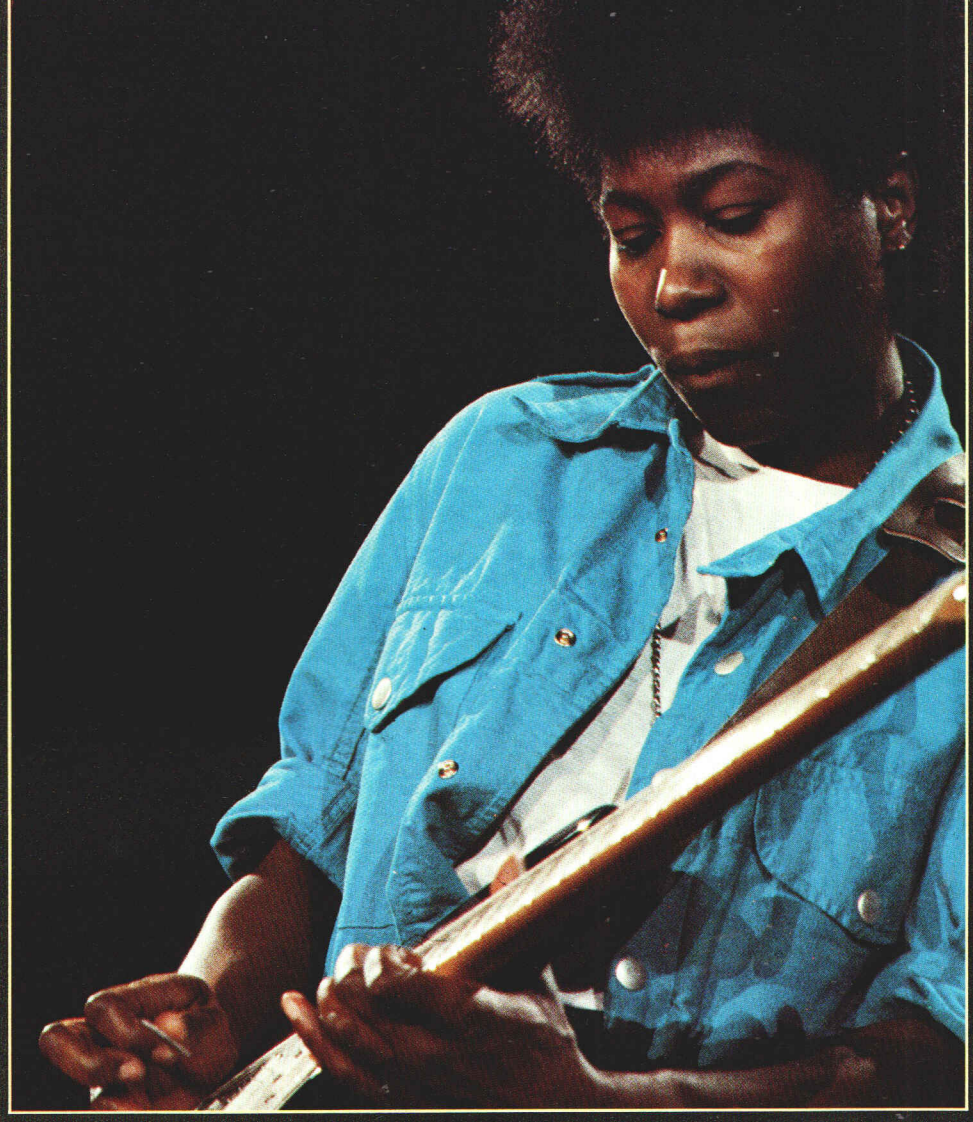
'Kissin' And A Huggin''. *To The Limit* showed Joan exploring reggae rhythms, notably in 'From The Bottom To The Top' and was punchier and less sentimental.

After recording a live album, *Steppin' Out* (1979), Johns and Armatrading parted company, both perhaps feeling that they needed a rest from each other. Joan's subsequent releases, 1980's *Me Myself I* (produced by Richard Gottehrer), 1981's *Walk Under Ladders* and 1983's *The Key* (both produced by Steve Lillywhite) each represented conscious moves on her part towards a rockier sound. *The Key* yielded a Top Twenty single, 'Drop The Pilot', in January 1983.

All three albums were successful, making Numbers 5, 6 and 10 respectively in the UK charts, but – apart from the occasional gem, such as 'I'm Lucky' from *Walk Under Ladders* with its powerful synthesiser bassline and 'I Love It (When You Call Me Names)' from *The Key*, with its jokey S-M lyrics, catchy tune and wild guitar solo by Adrian Belew – these LPs lacked the grace, power and tonal variety of her work with Johns. Nonetheless, in the increasingly arid music scene of the early Eighties, Joan Armatrading could claim to have retained a measure of consistency and integrity in her quest for commercial success that few solo performers could match.

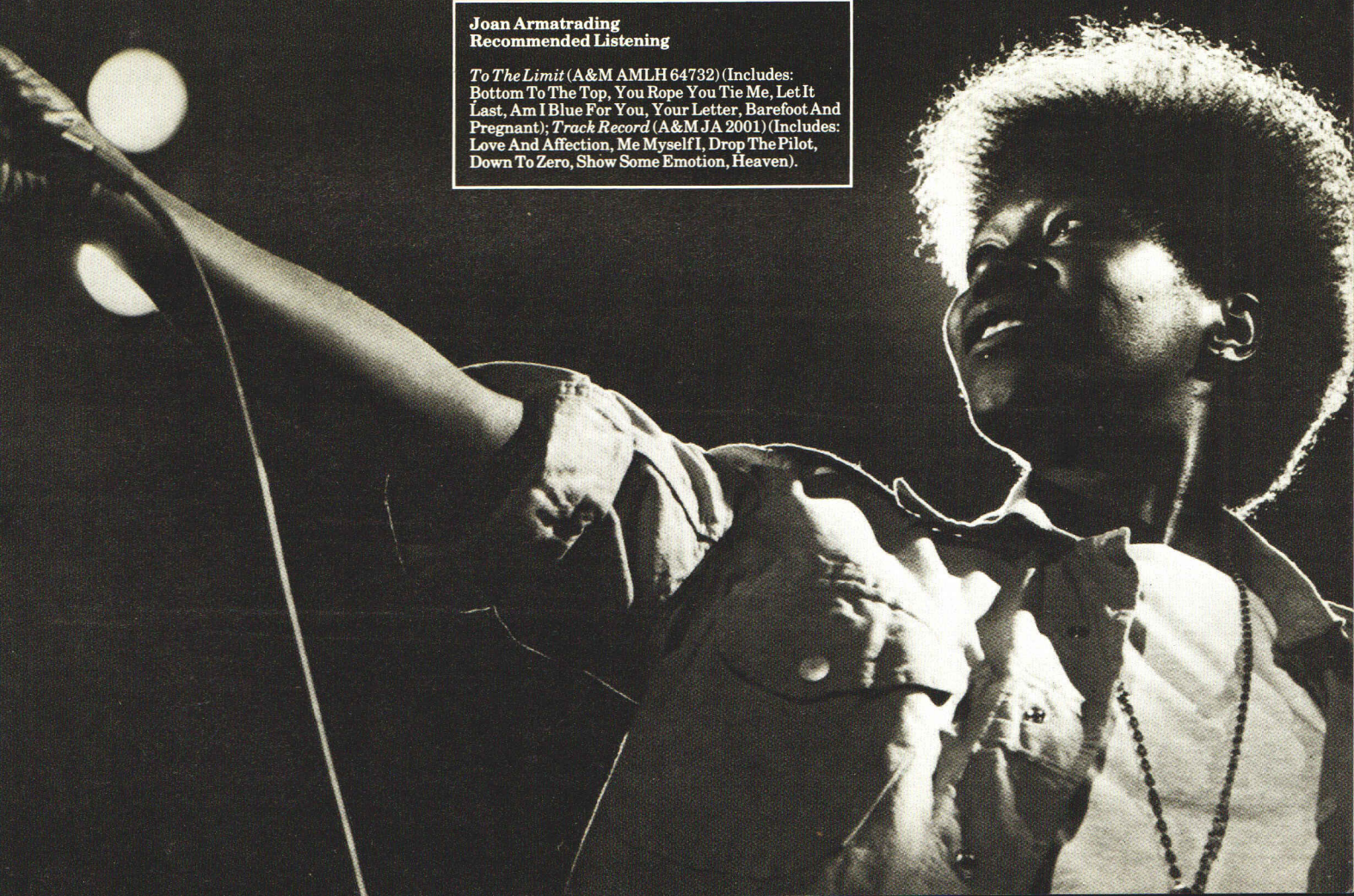
ALASTAIR DOUGALL

Joan's move from gentle, acoustic funk (opposite) to electric rock (right) reflects her growing assurance as a live performer in the Eighties (below).

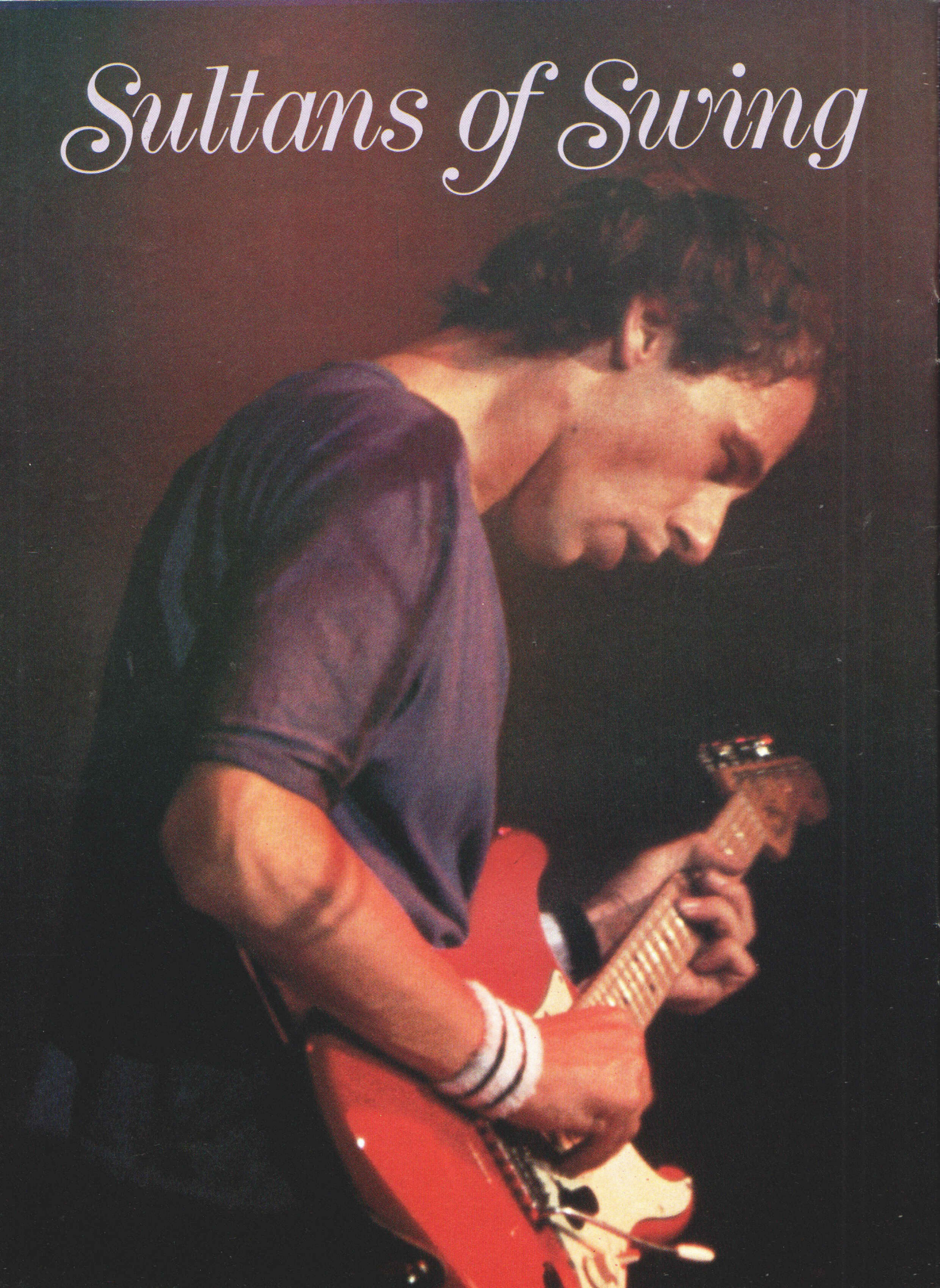


Joan Armatrading
Recommended Listening

To The Limit (A&M AMLH 64732) (Includes: Bottom To The Top, You Rope You Tie Me, Let It Last, Am I Blue For You, Your Letter, Barefoot And Pregnant); *Track Record* (A&M JA 2001) (Includes: Love And Affection, Me Myself I, Drop The Pilot, Down To Zero, Show Some Emotion, Heaven).



Sultans of Swing



The relaxed expertise of Dire Straits

Opposite: Mark Knopfler 'steps out and bends one'. Above: Dire Straits in 1983, from left Knopfler, John Illsley, Hal Lindes, Terry Williams and Alan Clark. Williams replaced original drummer Pick Withers after 1982's Love Over Gold.

OF ALL THE BANDS to have emerged in the late Seventies, none appeared more out of step with the times than Dire Straits. Launched at a time when rock was still experiencing the after-effects of punk and led by balding guitarist Mark Knopfler, Dire Straits appeared to have been caught in a late Sixties/early Seventies time warp. As far as the group were concerned, the punk shake-up that occurred in London in 1976 might never have taken place.

Although their image was decidely unfashionable, Dire Straits had one thing going for them in the climate of the late Seventies British rock scene: they *were* a 'street band'. Like Nick Lowe and Ian Dury, Dire Straits had served their musical apprenticeship on the London pub-rock scene that had evolved in the Seventies, although it should be added that the group had not spent years slogging round this grimy circuit. Apart from drummer Pick Withers, the members of the band – Mark Knopfler (lead guitar and vocals), David Knopfler (rhythm guitar) and John Illsley (bass) – were relative newcomers to the music scene.

Swinging into action

Mark Knopfler (born 12 August 1949) was in his late twenties when the band was formed in 1977, and had had time to absorb and utilise a number of influences, most notably those of Bob Dylan and that quintessentially 'laid-back' songwriter-guitarist J. J. Cale. Knopfler was certainly no callow youth: by the time he formed Dire Straits in 1977, he had already pursued two separate careers – as a journalist and as a teacher. His skills as a songwriter and guitarist had had time to mature fully; those who listened to Dire Straits' first single, 'Sultans Of Swing', found it hard to believe that the record was not the work of a seasoned performer.

'Sultans Of Swing' began life as a £120 demo disc that found its way on to the playlist of Charlie Gillett's 'Honky Tonk' show on Radio London. The Sunday lunchtime show kept abreast of all that was new and exciting on the London scene, as well as featuring top American talent like Ry Cooder and sundry other rhythm and blues performers. The record immediately caused a minor sensation, and within weeks numerous record company representatives, chequebooks at the ready, were to be found hovering in the wings at Dire Straits' increasingly well-attended gigs.

Released on Phonogram's Vertigo label, 'Sultans Of Swing' took time to gain the public's attention, but finally claimed its deserved place in the charts, reaching Number 9 after the appearance of the band's first LP. *Dire Straits* (1978) made Number 5 in the UK album chart, and within a year the band had conquered virtually all of the world's major record markets. They became particularly popular in the US, their music being more acceptable to American radio programmers than much of what was then emanating from the British record industry.

Future Dire Straits releases would be criticised for their blandness, but 'Sultans of Swing' remains a classic single. As the record shows, Dire Straits were largely a vehicle for Knopfler's guitar-playing and songwriting. Although unquestionably American in feel, 'Sultans Of Swing' sought to evoke Knopfler's experiences of London. He had been born in the capital, but had spent most of his life in the north of England; he thus saw London with the fascinated eyes of an outsider. 'Sultans Of Swing' was a paean to a bunch of South London amateur jazz musicians who could blow with the best. 'Wild West End', also from the first album, represented another of Knopfler's slices of London life.

Dire Straits' first album had been produced by Muff Winwood, the elder brother of multi-talented instrumentalist-singer Steve Winwood. For their second album, the group decided to enlist the service of veteran R&B producers Jerry Wexler and Barry Beckett. This was not a particularly surprising move, as several critics had claimed that Winwood had made the group sound too 'clean'. It was assumed that Wexler and Beckett, who had worked with the greatest R&B artists, would beef up Dire Straits' sound.

In fact, the ensuing album, *Communiqué* (1979), differed little from its predecessor, underlining the impression that Dire Straits were fundamentally bland on record. Knopfler's playing was as tasteful as ever, although the LP's songs were not as strong as those on the first LP (a single release, 'Lady Writer', only made Number 51 in the UK) and thereby emphasised his limitations as a vocalist. Their sound seemed to ensure them continued commercial rewards, however, and *Communiqué* sold just as well as the first LP.

Keys to success

During their brief career, Dire Straits had never needed to struggle to find their own identity. Knopfler's musical vision, derivative though it was, was perfectly in focus from the beginning. While this led to the band's immediate success, it also meant that after a relatively short time, Dire Straits had become too stylised for their own good. But changes seemed imminent when second guitarist David Knopfler, tired of being in his elder brother's shadow, decided to leave the group and go solo.

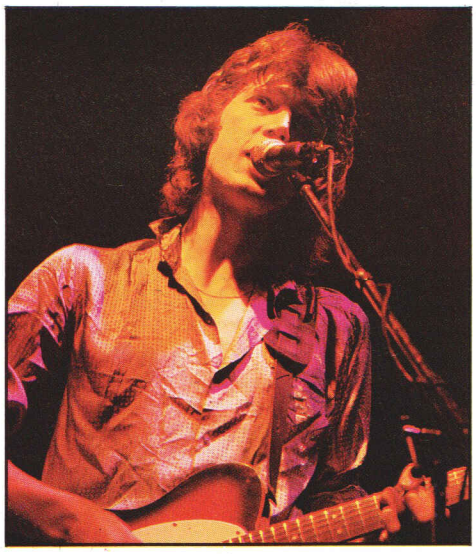
For Dire Straits' next album, *Making Movies* (1980), Mark Knopfler decided to play all the guitar himself and bring in keyboard-player Roy Bittan, from Bruce

Above: Dire Straits in full swing. Right: David Knopfler, who left the band to pursue a solo career.

Springsteen's E Street Band, to freshen up the group's music. Bittan's playing certainly helped *Making Movies* to be a more satisfying album than *Communiqué*. It reached Number 4 in the UK charts and contained one of Mark Knopfler's finest compositions, the 'street-light' ballad 'Romeo And Juliet' (a Number 11 hit). For Dire Straits' 1980 tour, Hal Lindes played rhythm guitar, with Alan Clark on keyboards.

Going for gold

Meanwhile, Knopfler's stock as a guitarist continued to rise; he played on some prestigious sessions, working with Dylan on *Slow Train Coming* (1979) and with Steely Dan on *Gaucho* (1980). The influence of Dylan and, it must be added, Bruce Springsteen, had always loomed large in Knopfler's songwriting and playing. These American influences were more apparent than ever on *Love Over Gold* (1982), the LP that took Dire Straits to new commercial heights, reaching Number 1 in the UK album charts.



Love Over Gold – which featured Mike Manieri on vibes and Ed Walsh on synthesiser – was the group's best album since their auspicious debut. Produced entirely by Knopfler, who by this time had taken up residence in New York, it was a meticulous piece of work. Side one consisted of just two songs – the heroic 'Telegraph Road', which owed more than a little to Springsteen, and the atmospheric 'Private Investigations', a UK Number 2, whose classical overtones recalled the second part of Fleetwood Mac's 1969 hit 'Oh Well'. Another highlight was the quirky humour of 'Industrial Disease', the shortest track on the LP at two seconds under six minutes.

The following year Knopfler composed the soundtrack for Bill Forsyth's *Local Hero* (1983) and completed work on Dylan's *Infidels* (1983), which he co-produced and also played on. In commercial terms, Mark Knopfler had proved himself to be one of the most successful performers to have come to the fore since the late Seventies. The suspicion remained, however, that he was a skilled artisan rather than a genuinely original talent.

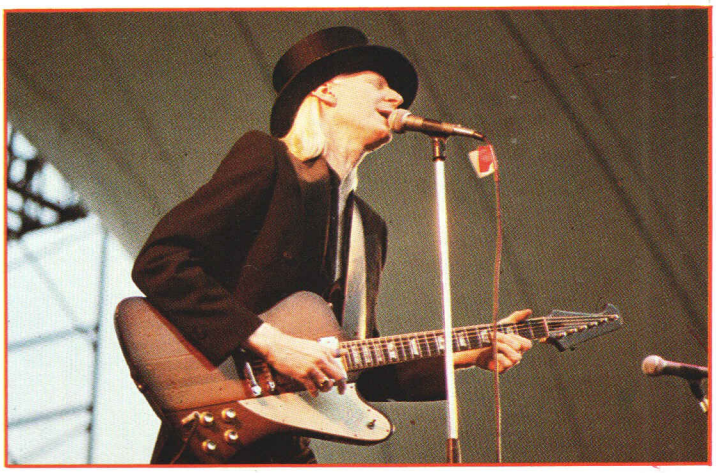
STEVE CLARKE

Dire Straits
Recommended Listening

Dire Straits (Vertigo 9102 021) (Includes: Sultans Of Swing, Wild West End, Six Blade Knife, Water Of Love, Lions, Down To The Waterline); *Making Movies* (Vertigo 6359 034) (Includes: Tunnel Of Love, Romeo And Juliet, Solid Rock, Les Boys, Hand In Hand, Expresso Love).

THE GREAT MUSICIANS

Johnny Winter



A topper-clad Johnny Winter plays one of his rare 'reverse head' Gibson Firebirds. Overleaf: Winter twangs a Fender Mustang.

A thin and wiry cross-eyed albino from Texas, Johnny Winter seems an unlikely candidate for the role of 'guitar hero'. But he stands alongside Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck as one of the greatest players to emerge from the electric-guitar revolution of the late Sixties.

Winter came from a musical family. His father played saxophone and banjo, his mother played the piano, and both Johnny and his brother Edgar were encouraged to take up instruments at an early age. Johnny began on clarinet, moved on to ukulele and eventually took up guitar when he was 11. 'Every second that I wasn't doing something else that I had to do, I'd be playing guitar,' he later said. 'It was just an obsession. I guess I played at least six or eight hours a day from the time I started until I was 15.'

His obsession with playing was eventually matched by a growing absorption in one particular style of music – the blues. He was first introduced to blues-playing by Clarence Garlow, a disc jockey on a black radio station in Beaumont, Winter's home town. Garlow was also a guitarist, and he would show Winter blues licks and pass on technical hints such as using a thinner, unwound third (G) string (at that time a comparatively new idea) to facilitate more extreme bending of notes. Winter also built up a huge collection of records by the American blues greats – Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Otis Rush, Sonny Boy Williamson and many others.

Little wonder then that, when he stormed onto the international rock'n'roll stage in 1969, Winter's music bore a more ethnic stamp than that of most of his contemporaries. While Hendrix, Clapton and the others had taken the blues as a starting-point from which they had rapidly departed, it remained the cornerstone of Winter's art, even during his temporary excursions into the psychedelic/progressive borderlands in the early Seventies.

Winter mustered a version of the blues which, while retaining its traditional black feel, also incorporated the high-volume electric guitar wizardy of Hendrix. 'Leland Mississippi Blues' from *Johnny Winter* (1969) was a good example of how Winter moulded the formula to his purpose; the chord changes were the same as for an orthodox 12-bar blues, but a couple of sneaky additional riff insertions made it a 14-bar sequence. The song was skilfully woven round a mixture of riffs played by bass and guitar, with the lead guitar tracing the vocal lines in ragged unison. Although recorded in the studio, there were no overdubs and the overall sound was as raw and austere as that produced by the grand old masters themselves. The difference was in the volume and energy that Winter brought to the old form.

Winter also introuced a new level of technical facility to blues-playing. The hours of obsessional practice in his early teens brought him to a stage of proficiency well in advance of the earlier blues players. Aside from the sheer speed and power of his attack, Winter has certain traits peculiar to his playing style; although he uses it to the same effect as a plectrum, he actually plays with a thumb-pick, which leaves him free to pick with his fingers as well. On 'Mississippi Delta Blues', a live favourite, he is able to pluck a rhythm sequence on the top strings with his fingers while picking out a melody line on the bass strings with his thumb after the fashion of Chet Atkins.

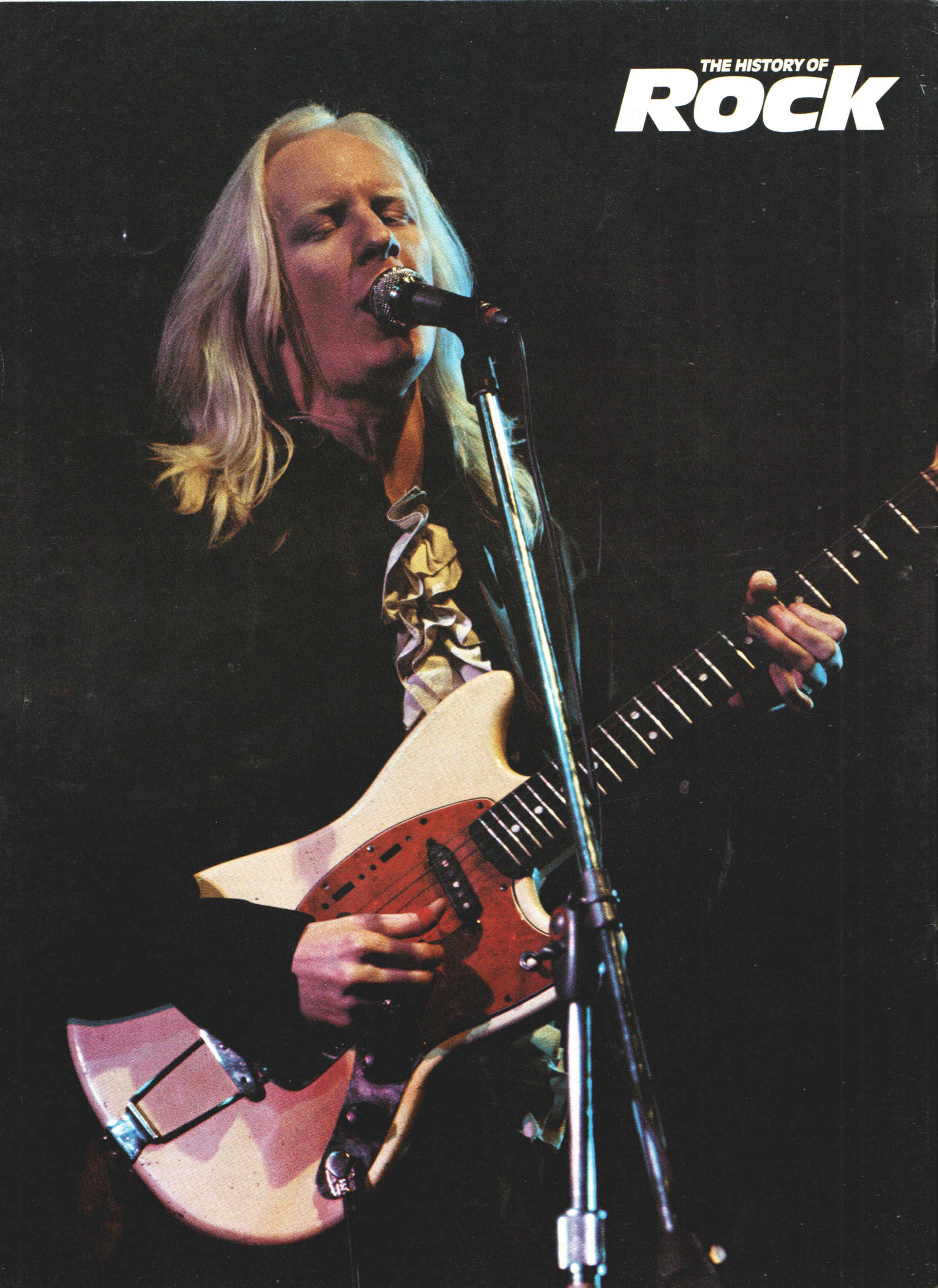
One area of special expertise for which Winter is noted is his slide-guitar playing – a style regarded by most rock guitarists as something with an occasional novelty value, but a highly-valued technique in the blues-player's catalogue. Winter is a virtuoso slide player of exceptional dexterity; his playing follows the pattern of such originators as Errol Hooker, Sam Paton and Robert Johnson in tending to pick out individual notes rather than block chordings, using an old piece of plumber's conduit piping on his little finger and various open tunings. 'Highway 61 Revisited'' from *Second Winter* (1970) provided a striking example of Winter's bottleneck style, being structured round alternate verses of singing and slide which built up to a momentous climax where steel tubing, steel string and steel pick-up seemed to shriek in unison like the wheels of a braking freight train.

The 1971 album *Johnny Winter And* showed Winter capable of a more experimental approach, although still operating well within the boundaries of mainstream rock'n'roll. Numbers such as 'I Guess I'll Go Away' and 'Nothing Left', with their use of distortion and phasing effects, had an altogether more spacey, acid-rock feel and were the furthest that Winter ever strayed from the blues format.

Throughout his career Winter has favoured Gibson Firebird guitars, and has built up quite a collection of the rare 'reverse head' model, a discontinued line from the Sixties. He removes the tremolo and replaces the tailpiece, preferring to rely on his manual left-hand vibrato than put up with the inevitable tuning problems caused by a tremelo arm. In the early days he used the familiar 100-watt Marshall stacks but later changed to smaller combos – at his 1983 appearance in London he had three Music Man combos linked in series. He is also a devotee of the acoustic guitar, using a jumbo flat-top Gibson on a number such as the country-tinged 'Ain't Nothing To Me' on *Still Alive And Well* (1973). For the real old-time slide playing Winter may use an old National steel guitar or a Dobro to achieve an 'authentic' tinny metallic sound, as on 'TV Mama' from the album *Nothin' But The Blues* (1977).

In 1983, Winter, supported by his long-time partner bassist/harp player Jon Paris and drummer Moe Potts, was still playing with heartening vigour and demonstrating his command of every nuance and permutation of the electric blues form. A peerless player and an inspiration to many of the new generation of rock guitarists, Winter is now himself a grand old master of the blues, a form of music so central to the development of rock.

DAVID SINCLAIR


THE HISTORY OF
Rock